THE Women of the Gael

James F. Cassidy, B. A.

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THE WOMEN
OF
THE GAEL

By
JAMES F. CASSIDY, B. A.

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Prefatory Note

IT IS proper that a country that has taken for itself the most feminine representation should have a book devoted to the eulogy of its womanhood. "The Women of the Gael" renders justice—even romantic justice—to the womanhood of the country whose representations are Dark Rosaleen, and Kathleen ni Houlihan, and The Poor Old Woman. Its writer has made of it a long roll of honor, a roll of women with beautiful names who have been remembered for their piety, their learning, and their patriotism: It is distinctly a Legend of Good Women.

Little is said of another type of woman that has been celebrated from far-of times in Ireland — the woman whose virtue was in her overflowing energy, the woman whose type is Queen Maeve, bearer of warrior children, herself a warrior and a great lover. And naturally in a Legend of Good Women nothing would be said of that woman of the O'Briens who, on coming back to her castle, finds the women lamenting for her husband slain in battle, and says "Dead men are no use to us here," and rides back to the battle-line, and there and then marries the general of the opposing army. Little is said of the women of that type: The Women of the Gael who are spoken of have their names on the roll for being guardians of the national virtue and custodians of the Gaelic civilization.

The conquest of Ireland — or rather, the repeated half-conquests of the country — inflicted an especial wrong upon the Women of the Gael. Peculiarly fitted as they were for a brilliant social life and for artistic enterprise of every kind, they were, with the exception of privileged ones, deprived of a life that might have such manifestations. It was theirs to spiritualize as harsh conditions as were anywhere. A single glimpse is often revealing, and we have seen Connacht women come in from working in the fields,

stand by a little window, and with hands that have labored outside, work the delicate lace that is to become the possession of some radiant lady at the other side of the ocean. And we have often heard from women who have finished such double tasks such wit and poetry as one would listen for in vain in the drawing room of the radiant lady. That clever observer of European life, Max O'Rell, placed Europe's most charming women in Hungary and in Ireland. "In the drawing rooms of Buda-Pesth," he said. And he was compelled to add "In the potato-fields of Ireland."

The conquest of Ireland is being repealed, and the democracy of Ireland is emerging towards the brilliant social life and the artistic enterprise that the women of Ireland are so well fitted for. And, as Father Cassidy has shown, the women of the Gael well deserve a place in that redeemed democracy, for it is largely due to them — to their inspiration, their heroic memory, their courage, their actual combativeness, that the emancipation has been achieved. It it due to them that Ireland has remained Irish and Gaelic. The women always had more than a single share of the racial heritage, and the Norse and the Normans and the English who married with them found that their children had it in them to become "Kindly Irish of the Irish."

Another observer of Europe — Dr. Brandes, I think — has noted that in Germanic countries the men, in terms of personality, are superior to the women; that in Latin countries men and women are equal, and in Slavonic countries — he was thinking especially of Poland — the women are superior to the men. Ireland in this regard is like Latin Europe — indeed in some parts she is close to Slavonic Europe. Again let us go to the most Gaelic part of Europe — to Connacht. There the men are certainly not superior to the women; the women, in terms of personality have the ascendency. This may be due, not to a racial heritage, but to local circumstances, for the smallness of the fields in a place where one works only with the spade, gives the man little room for development. However that may be, the women in Connacht have the ascendency,

and this ascendency has left a spiritual mark — in the beautiful and poignant songs that express the woman's side in love, and in the number of words in the language the use for the things that are especially in the woman's care — the number of words for "child" for instance. The Gaelic civilization as we see it in Connacht is distinctly a feminine civilization.

Even if we had no record in history of the status of women in Ireland, we could judge that it was high from saga and romance, and from those naive reconstructions of history that early peoples make. The epic tale and the sagas show women moving with more freedom than they have in Homer and more freedom than they have in the Germanic sagas. The very names for Ireland — Eire, Banba, Fodhla, were taken from the three queens that the Milesian adventurers found in Ireland. All this would show that the status was high and free. But we have an actual law promulgated in 694-5 that gives a notable franchise to women.

Before that time, in a disturbed epoch, there must have been great hardships inflicted on the women of Ireland. They had to take part in war and in battle. But in Ireland there were men who were revolted by these conditions, and that distinguished scholar and statesman, Adamnan, abbot of Iona and friend of the Venerable Bede, undertook to win a status for them.

He was travelling with his mother and he offered to carry her on his back. She refused his help, saying she would not be carried by an undutiful son. Where had he failed in his duty? Adamnan asked. She told him he had failed because he had not freed the women of Ireland from their political bondage. There and then he undertook to do it, going on a hunger-strike until the Kings would come to terms with him. "It shall not be in my time if it is done," said the King, Loingsech Bregban, speaking like the conservative of all time, "an evil time when a man's sleep shall be murdered for women, that women should live men should be slain. Put the deaf and dumb to the sword who asserts anything but that women shall be in ever-

lasting bondage to the brink of Doom." Seven kings supported Loingsech, but, by the power of God, Adamnan overcame them. Thereafter Adamnan's law was accepted, and the securities for its fulfilment were — The Sun and the Moon and all the other elements of God, Peter, Paul, Andrew and all the other Apostles, together with the Irish saints. Those who violated the law drew on themselves the maledictions of those great powers. Adamnan also inserted a curse in the daily service against those who put themselves against the spirit of the law.

After that the women of Ireland had unquestioned status. They had control of their own property. Those who drew them into battle were punished severely. If a man slew a woman he was condemned to two-fold punishment. If a woman was slain by part of an army every fifth man up to the three hundredth was condemned to a severe penalty. Even for insult the penalty was made heavy. "If it be by making a gentlewoman blush by imputing unchastity to her, or by throwing doubt on the legitimacy of her offspring a fine of seven *cumals* shall be exacted."

The position of women in Ancient Ireland is revealed by the apostrophe of the writer of the tenth century treatise on "Adamnan's Law." "Adamnan suffered much harship for your sake, O women, so that ever since Adamnan's time one half of your house is yours, and there is a place for your chair in the other half; so, that your contract and your safeguard are free. And the first law made in Heaven and on Earth for women is Adamnan's Law." So, very long ago, women in Ireland had a position that was formally recognized.

It is very just that at this time a writer should make a record for the women of Ireland, reminding us of what that clever cosmopolitan observer who has been quoted before, Max O'Rell, once said. "There will be no one to tell it, but bear this in mind: If ever Ireland come to anything it will be because of her women." Well, Ireland, has come to something. And there has been one to tell us why: It is because of the faith, the courage, the wisdom and the wit of THE WOMEN OF THE GAEL.

PADRAIC COLUM.

Introduction

The Women of the Gael

ANY national biography that seriously neglects the role of woman in a people's life must be condemned as dwarfed and incomplete. It is a repudiation of an element of a nation's existence that is most vitally fundamental and forceful. It lacks that medium through which the eye of the interpretative searcher after truth can behold the mystic depths of a nation's soul and reveal with a sense of substantial realism the glory, beauty and strength which live and operate in the corporate individuality of a people. Nationhood is a most delicately fashioned and intricate thing and defies with ease all human efforts to accomplish its ultimate and perfect analysis. The clearest conception of its nature can only be attained by a study of the simplest yet most enduring and far-reaching factors on which its perplexing labyrinth is constructed. At the fountain-head whence the stream of life has issued must the student labour to acquire a reasonably successful knowledge of the secrets of a people's evolution and there he shall find that the greatest and most

life-giving element of this nutritive spring is woman.

Nationhood is primarily the product of spiritual forces. Divorced from the mastery of the soul a people may constitute for itself a world hegemony through the power of its artillery or the multitude of its merchant-men but it cannot boast of fidelity to that part of its nature which alone has the most enduring influence upon the future of itself and of all mankind. It is for this reason that woman is more essentially responsible for the development of the ideas that make for the perpetuity of national life. She is the main worker in the garden of the souls of children whence the nation must extract its spiritual nutrition. She is more constantly and familiarly in contact with the sacredness of the child soul than man. Hence her knowledge of the precious beings confided to her care endows her with limitless power to win their confidence and mould their character. When she points the way to the ruling verities of the invisible world the impressionable heart of the child naturally heeds her words for it trusts the one it knows best and, above all, the one whose feminine delicacy is a most efficient interpreter of the spiritual world for the young and tender soul.

If this feminine contribution to the greatness of nations is an indubitable fact that can not be overlooked it is especially so in the case of Ireland. Nowhere does woman exert a greater influence than in that island outpost of western

Europe. Several influences conspire to create for her therein an atmosphere most congenial for the operation of her nature. Of these we will cite a few of the most potent. The manhood of the Irish Celt has a decidedly supernatural bent which has established within it a sympathetic comprehension of woman born of a striking kinship with her being. The feminine factor in the Irishman's make-up begets a remarkable harmony of thought and feeling between him and his racial sister which resulting in unbounded trust in her gives her an honoured position as mother, wife and maiden that is scarcely paralleled in any other country. Then, too, he is an idealist and hungers for an idol to worship, for some worthy object to absorb the highest energy of his soul: this he finds in a pure womanhood. Yet, despite the delicacy of his nature the Irishman is as manly a type as breathes. On this account he finds in the extreme femininity of the daughters of the Gael a most suitable complement of his own sturdy manliness. The sheer force of contrast draws him towards her with a sense of passionate reverence and a vivid conception of the many qualities of her being that are admirably calculated to fill many a void in his nature and contribute to its strength and happiness.

Fully cognisant of this dominating position of woman in Irish life the writer with a sense of duty as well as pleasure has assumed the task of paying a more extensive tribute to the daughters of the Gael than has hitherto appeared in print. This we

do not intend to accomplish by elabourate accounts of distinguished individuals in severe isolation from the common mass of Irish womanhood. We hope that the nature of our work shall be such that the reader can see in the women who enter into our narrative great and brilliant personalities dependent for their nobility on the wine of inspiration which they derived from the secret vintage of character which is the heritage of the whole body of the daughters of Erin. The greatness of the relatively few with whom we have to deal shall be symbolic of the greatness of the many because it would have been impossible had not the common properties of feminine Gaeldom been wholesome and enduring. The distinguished daughters of Ireland are the bright-crested billows of the vast sea of the womanhood of their race dependent for their might and beauty on the ever bounteous depths of the source that produced and sustained them. They are no freakish exceptions but the continuous and unfailing products of their race and civilisation.

And just as truly as their lives reveal traits that are the property of the race rather than qualities inhering in a mere group of abnormally gifted individuals so they also manifest attributes that are primarily in consonance with all that is womanly. They are rarely sexually unsphered when doing the work of Ireland. Sometimes, indeed, feminine activity assumes an aggressiveness that savours of masculinity in the field of battle,

the diplomatic arena and the sphere of the agitator. Even in these instances Irish women primarily forge their way to success because they are women. No matter what masculinity of fibre is discoverable in their personalities it is not such as to unsex them and deprive them of that spirituality of appeal which feminine character flings out to an impressionable and soulful manhood. In other words, womanhood is practically in its entirety valuable to Ireland as an indirect rather than a direct force. It furnishes a light of idealism in which the manhood of the nation sees many incentives for the maintenance of its patriotic endeavours and the deeds it inspires by its spirit-influence are far more important than anything that results from its own direct participation in acts that are more suited for manly hands to do. It wins for itself a respect that compels men to regard it as an intimate and most sacred part of that national heritage for which they were in honour bound to struggle and die.

CHAPTER I

In the Pagan Tales of Love and War

IN THE tales of old, be they of a mythical or quasi-mythical nature, there is much embalmed that is founded on the rock of fact. A man may regard with the eyes of a skeptic the existence of gods and heroes but he can not deny that the milieu of thought and sentiment which envelopes them must reveal most interesting aspects of the creative brain whence they emanated. Indeed, peoples in their infancy give in their literary creations a more real expression of racial principles than any bald scientific enumeration of facts can furnish. As a well-known writer states: "the mythical heroes which a race creates for itself, the aspirations which it embodies and illustrates, the sentiments which it immortalises in story and ballad, will help us to understand the real character of the race better than it could be expounded to us by any collection of the best authenticated statistics."* Mere figures have only an incomplete mathematical value whilst the vital and human currents of thought-electricity that vivify the pages of ancient story are a more reliable index

* Irish Literature. ed Justin MaCarthy. Vol. 1 p. i.

of the qualities that reside in the power-house of that section of humanity to which they owe their existence.

Bearing this in mind we go back to the twilight of Gaelic story for our initial views of Irish womanhood. Here we find the feminine section of the Gael enjoying a conspicuous place in the world of letters. Kindling in the hearts of men the fires of tenderness or rousing within them the tempests of battle-fury these ancient heroines are worthy subjects of epic masterpieces. The spell that is associated with their majesty of manner is as potent to hypnotise and woo to sympathetic mood, the reader as is the magic charm of their alluring and delicate femininity.

Who that knows aught of literature has not heard of Deirdre, that sorrow-burdened woman symbolic of suffering Eire? She is the central figure of the tragic tale that bears her name and so magnificent is the woe that encircles her therein that Dr. Sigerson deems this piece of literature "the first tragedy outside the classics in Europe." It is certainly the finest, most pathetic and deftly executed of all the ancient tales of Ireland.

And the greatness that is Deirdre's is not rooted in conquering malice but a resplendent nobility. The helpless prey of a malign destiny she permits the surges of woe to inundate and overwhelm her without ever losing her queenly dignity. Like a luminous symbol expressive of the sorrow and unflinching heroism of the Celt she concentrates

in her personality the twin and constant heritage of the race, grief ever mating with invincible majesty of mien. Honourable principle and sweetest tenderness form in her a combination that constitute her one of the most sublime women of myth. True to the bond of affection that binds her to her brothers she fears not to accompany them whithersoever they may go, though the threatening clouds of impending disaster tell this child of prophecy of the inevitable fate that is hers. She leaves the pleasant ways of Alba behind her where the raptures of the cuckoo's voice on bending bough and the glory of scenic beauty held her soul enthralled and faces with fortitude the stern future of her visions. When utter grief had become her lot and cruel perfidy brought her lover, Naoisi, and her brothers, Annla and Ardan to their violent deaths she mourns them with a titanic sorrow that is intensely expressive of the Irishwoman's loyalty to family and kin. Listen to her as the torrent of lament pours forth through the floodgates of her soul while she stands by the grave of the beloved three and you can not but feel admiration for the infant genius of the Gael that could create in the utterance of this far-off lonely figure so human and time-defying an appeal:

"O man who diggest the new grave
Make not the grave narrowly;
Beside the grave I will be—
Making sorrow and lamentations.

I was not one day alone,
Till the day of the making of the grave
Though oftentimes have I myself
And yourself been lonely.

I am Deirdre without pleasure
And I in the end of my life;
Since it is grievous to be after them,
I will myself not be long.

Turning from dignified sorrow to the stern field of war we find a female character strong with the strength of the Gael's pride. This is Maeve, the peerless warrior queen of Connaught. She is one of the leading personalities of the Tain, which is numbered amongst the greatest prose epics of antiquity. All the tempestuous scenes of strife, wild cattle forays and deathless deeds of chivalry that live in the womb of the Tain are not deemed too terrible or splendid to find their source in the pride of a woman of the Gael. The Greeks built the masterpiece of the Illiad on the weakness of Helen but the Irish evolved the Tain from the massive and unbending fibre of royal Maeve's character.

Yet for all her stubborn strength she had the heart of a woman. Verses still survive to show that when that husband over whom she towered lay still in death she gave vent to a truly feminine lament indicative of a sense of loss created by the departure from her life of one whom the soul

of a woman needed. "Kindly king" she exclaimed,

> ". . . . . who liked not lies,
> Rash to rise to fields of fame,
> Raven black his brows of fear,
> Razor-sharp his spear of flame."

It is little wonder that her fascination for literary minds is cosmopolitan and that — to mention one of many notables of the pen — she captivated the inspired eye of Spenser who deemed her worthy of a place in his masterpiece, the Faerie Queene.

But it is in the tales that are burdened with the eternal message of love, that key to the gateway of power, which woman wields with sovereign skill that the daughters of ancient Eire play the most conspicuous part. In this type of literature which is so vitally dependent for inspiration on a true study of womanhood the Irish took an especial interest. A considerable portion of the early heroic literature is devoted to the subject of love and the power that woman wields through it to move great men to deeds that claim the tribute of a nation's admiration. No less than thirteen courtships and twelve elopements enjoy the company of Ireland's other ancient tales. We have it from no less an authority than Eleanor Hull that the first story of the human race telling of the activities of passionate hearts came from the brain of the Gael. It was Ireland first glorified the mysteries veiling and the beauty in

forming the magnetism of woman's heart for man and the noble efforts of the latter to be worthy of the admiration of the gentler sex. The country was fortunate in the selection of the subject to which she was to give special attention for she manipulated it with a rare success. In her early literature of love, heroines possess a variety of type and a distinctness and individuality of character that surpass what is best even in the Arthurian legend.

One of the tenderest love tales ever penned is the Wooing of Etain, which deals with the lure there was in the heart of a lady of no mortal lineage for a monarch of Ireland. It is permeated by a singular detachment from debased motive and a certain platonism in the immaterial hunger of soul for soul that is generally the attribute of all kindred themes in Gaelic letters. The heart of a monarch is subdued by the vision of a woman whose ruling attraction is the spiritual beauty of her form and the life she enjoys in Tir na N-Og, the land of pure though passionate hearts. Yet for all the spirit influence of Etain she embodies much that is human and feminine.

The most primitive attempt of the Gael to tell in song of love is found in Fand's Farewell to Cuchulainn. In it there dwells a pathos most striking and delicate for so early an age. In spirituality of feeling it is akin to the Wooing but its human tenderness and heart searching potency is its supreme asset. It is in this dom-

inant characteristic that its guarantee of immortality resides for there is little doubt but that in the words of Dr. Sigerson the music of its passionate chimes shall "vibrate in the human heart till mankind is no more."

In the Fenian cycle of saga there is bountiful evidence of the love-impetuosity of the Celt. Caoilte's Urn yields a proof of the impulsive readiness of heroic Ireland to respond to the attractions of women when their mode of appeal was even decidedly intellectual. Finn, the arch-hero of the knightly Fenians, becomes at first sight the prey of the beauty of the daughter of Eanna. But the fair damsel did not rely on mere physical attractions and she took into her service the power of music to aid her symmetry of form in its onslaught on the soul of the rugged warrior. Thus her mode of wooing is elevated and subtle. She brings to her assistance her father, a noted harpist, whom the old Celtic writer with all the wealth of his perfervid imagination describes as unsurpassable. Speaking of the wondrous airs this musician could manipulate, he says: "if the deft goltarghleas were played for the kings of the melodious world, all that might hear, though sorrowless, would feel a lasting sorrow. If the clear gantarghleas were played for the grave kings of the earth, all that might hear without contempt would be forever laughing. If the full suantarghleas were played for the kings of the bright world, all that might hear (a wondrous way) would fall

into a lasting sleep.''* Thus did maidenhood in those days enlist the aid of the tearful, laughing, dreamy strains of the wizard of the harp to win its heart's desire. Is it little wonder that with such an ally it rarely failed to search all that was best in the inmost being of its beloved and batter down his last fortress of hesitancy?

A few other kindred tales there are worthy of some notice here. In Baile, the Sweet-Spoken, we meet with a most poignant picture having for its background a sublime passion. But the sword of sorrow that pierces as we read it borrows a terrible beauty from the love that produced it. The tragic glory with which it is endowed is but an index of the splendid fire of love in which its penetrating steel was tempered. Two passionate hearts grow cold in death through sheer grief for one another caused by the false news of mutual dissolution. The rumour was untrue but the credence given it made a reality of a non-existent tragedy.

Not so tragic but highly complimentary to woman is Diarmuid and Grainne, one of the finest of the Fenian tales. It is replete with the heroic efforts of a gallant knight to face unflinchingly all trials that might beset him to save and honour his intended bride. The fury of the jealous and relentless Finn menaced him on every side but the staunch young Diarmuid never failed to succour his beloved Grainne and the feats by which

* The Book of the Lays of Finn. J. MacNeill. p. 147.

he ofttimes rescued her from the most perilous situation illumine the story with an almost constant brilliancy of soul-stirring adventure.

Tales there are, too, that deal not specifically with love or war, though these in miniature appear, where woman is the pivotal point of interest. One is so preoccupied with a feminine problem that its title tells the reader that the actions of women is its sole theme; it is called The Women's War of Words. A banquet was provided by a noted entertainer named Bricriu for all that was most knightly in the Red Branch ranks. With the heroes came their ladies priding in their distinguished husbands. As the guests were about to take their places at the festive board the women sought positions in consonance with the rank of their lords. The result was a violent controversy for each lady contended for priority of place. As the debate waxed louder and more vehement it reached the ears of the banqueting nobles. The sound of the combatting voices roused them to battle-fury and only diplomacy kept them from red slaughter for their ladies' sake. They knew the unyielding pride of their womanhood rooted in the domestic virtue of devotion to their husbands and were ready to a man to vindicate it to the utmost.

A like principle of manly loyalty to womanhood is in evidence in the Burning of Finn's house. The women folk of this famous stead, in the absence of their husbands, raised a false cry of

alarm that they might behold an aged man named Garaid whom in his sleep they had bound by hair and beard to the hostel endeavoring to come to their rescue. The old warrior discovering the insult offered him, set fire to the house and committed them to a dreadful death. The story indeed manifests most primitive savagery on the part of the enraged warrior and crude wantonness on the part of the women. Yet the readiness with which they anticipated a response to their outcry shows their faith in the men of the Gael whilst the old man's vindictiveness is somewhat atoned for by his alertness of action for the sake of woman in distress. Garaid has the untamed passion of the early Gaelic fighting man which knows no checks in the presence of falsehood. Only where truth and honor clamoured for support in the service of womanhood did that wild temperament become submissive yoked to the service-chariot of the gentler sex.

Closely associated with the feminine ideals that permeate so much of the literature of love and war is that patriotic instinct which was the property of the women of the Gael. It pervades their domestic relations and lends a glamour to the tragedies of conflict. In the Death of Cuchulainn the solicitude of his wife and other ladies for his safety is prompted by their pride in him as prime champion of their land as well as by their womanly admiration for a magnificent type of manhood. When the sons of Galatin, in one of

the most dramatic incidents of the story, in league with the mystic agencies of the druids endeavor to secure the ruin of this champion of the Gael these ladies render futile their attempts and preserve him for the future glory of their country. In the touching song of Crede, daughter of Guaire the generous, the red fire of a woman's patriotic passion is kindled at the sight of the ruddy wounds that mar the figure of her father stricken in defense of his people. While she thinks of these, the angel touch of sleep cannot soothe her for their haunting presence are as "arrows that murder sleep in the bitter cold night." Thus might we enumerate instance after instance to demonstrate the ancient Irish belief in the patriotism of the women of Erin. The sayings of ladies are manifold displaying the 'amor patriae' that burned in their bosoms. It is even this sense of patriotism that contributes to the elevated moral principles of Irish womanhood in pagan days when they consider adultery one of the gravest of crimes. They regard it as a national as well as a moral stain on the soul of the guilty one for it strikes at that purity of race that is one of the most treasured possessions of the Celts. And if it is the spiritual and the poetic in the Irishman as well as his ruggedness of soul that rivet his being to his motherland it is only reasonable that these characteristics which are emphatically present in his very feminine sisterhood should bind it passionately to its country.

CHAPTER II

The Social Dignity Of Women

DEPARTING from the rose-tinged world of romance to a more prosaic discussion of the public and social position accorded woman in ancient Ireland there is an abundance of data at hand to render the fruits of our search highly creditable to our subject. Just as she has charm and influence where the finest and most soul-searching things of life are in demand, so she owns sterner qualities which procure her an honourable entrance to the place where clarity of intellect, robustness of spirit and fortitude of a high calibre adorn her actions and add lustre to her nation.

A vari-coloured evidence taken broadly from the different angles from which old writers regard her, shows their general acceptance of her capacity for shouldering public burdens. A prominence is commonly given therein to the role of woman in civic life that, in the literature of the Teutons is usually handed over to man. Eleanor Hull who is intimately acquainted with old Celtic writings ably summarises for us the evidence she discovers in favour of the social dignity of the daughters of the Gael. She tells us how marked

strength, and conquering ambition together with a subtle beauty and sunniness of temperament wins for Irish women the respect they covet. "The Irish women," she says, "belong to an heroic type. They are often the counsellors of their husbands and the champions of their cause; occasionally, as in Maeve's case, their masters. They are frequently fierce and vindictive, but they are also strong, forceful and intelligent. In youth they possess often a charming gaiety; they are full of clever repartee and waywardness and have a delightful and wayward self-confidence. Emer, especially has a great deal of the modern woman about her; she is no lovelorn maid to be caught by the words of a wooer's tongue, even though her lover is Cuchulainn; she is gay, petulant and not too readily satisfied. He thinks to win his cause simply by the fame of his name and the splendour of his appearance, but she makes larger demands; nor will she listen to his suit until she has won from him respect and admiration as well as affection."*

The nation seems to have been aware of the presence of these strong qualities and accordingly has recourse to unique methods to recognize its debt to its women. Some of the most distinguished amongst them are given a special prominence in the genealogical strata of which a tribal commonwealth was intensely jealous and proud. Oftentimes the names of noted men enshrined

* A Text Book of Irish Literature. p. 78.

those of their mothers thus linking the glory of maternal parents with that of their sons for all time. In this wise did the illustrious warrior of the North, King Conor Mac Nessa honour the one who bore him. Sometimes they are pursued even to their last long resting-place by the solicitude of the people. There are recorded instances of cemeteries for the burial of women alone where enduring sleep might hold them in honourable seclusion from the other sex and where the peril of having their memory obliterated through the intrusion of greater masculine celebrities might be obviated. But surpassing every tribute of respect to the women of the race is that of the writer who says that "after Mary, the Mother of God, the six best women in the world were Maeve, Saiv, Sarait, Erc, Emer and Achall." He feared not to compare the product of his land in its pagan state with the best that any other clime produced even under the tutelage of Christianity.

Considering more specifically the various departments in which the women of old won renown we find that in the councils which control the destinies of embattled hosts they were oftentimes conspicuous figures. Maeve of Connaught is the superior of her husband in the intellectual as well as the physical leadership of their armies. It was the strength of her arm and the virility of her mind that made the chieftains of three provinces with their troops hearken to her will. And when the manhood of three-fourths of Erin

met together under her banner to carry red war into Ulster to wrench from it the pride of its steers, the Dun Bull of Cooley, it was her master intellect that grappled with the problems of organization and strategy incidental to the enterprise. Hers was a commanding and invincible will that never quailed before obstructing forces and tested to its utmost the ingenuity of Cuchulainn himself. Sometimes when Ailill in the face of peril hesitated, his imperious queen brushed him aside and made her will triumphant with words of stern reproof and grim resolves such as, "Coward! . . . . If you don't decide, I will." And as in war, so in peace, her statesmanship and strength were evident. With a far-seeing power of vision she provided for the stability of her kingdom by measures of wisdom such as marriage alliances.

Women too, there were whose technical knowledge of the machinery then used in war and of the drill that should befit a champion of the battlefield was renowned. One of these entrusted with the preparation of the weapons for the Battle of Moytura was a woman. This proves that long before the feminine element became important in the Great War of 1914 as makers of munitions the Irish relied on the ability of women to fashion war's engines of destruction. A certain Eachtach was so conversant with the use of weapons that she braved the prowess of Finn himself and matched her skill against his by the "music of

her round spears." And the men of Ireland honoured her for her military science by a distinguished burial place at her death. Then there was Ciachni who 'radiated beauty' yet feared not to expose her loveliness to the hardships associated with prominence in the field of battle. The mother of Conor Mac Nessa was almost as noted as her famous son as a leader of men. Cuchulainn, the arch-hero of the Gael, confided himself to the tutelage of Scathach for the acquirement of special dexterity in the manipulation of arms.

Missions that demanded the intelligence of the counsellor and the courage of the warrior were often entrusted to women. They were frequently employed as ambassadors capable of being entrusted with messages of high import the execution of which often involved much peril. Three female runners were part of the official household of Finn Mac Cool. Lavercam who was a poetess was also an envoy of kings. She with another noted envoy had once the coveted distinction of seeking for Conor Mac Nessa when deep melancholy seized him some lady within the seas of Erin whose charms should dispel the heaviness of his heart.

As they were deemed worthy of sharing in the deliberations of high councils of state it is no cause for wonder that they were intimately associated with the legislative life of the land. They were regarded as eligible for the office of brehon or judge in a country which demanded rigid and

lengthy preparation for that position. A period of study ranging from ten to twenty years was required for candidates having judicial ambitions, for the mind of the country was decidedly a justice-loving one and could not tolerate poor intellectual equipment in the person responsible for the preservation of this virtue in the land. So well did women meet the requirements of the nation in this regard that some of those who were privileged to be brehons rose far beyond the commonplace in the execution of their duties and left the memory of their names an enduring one in Irish legal tradition. The decisions, for instance, of Brigh Brugaid determined as precedents in law cases in Gaelic courts for centuries.

But it was as objects of legal solicitude that we know most about them. Anyone who consults the Senchus Mor cannot fail to realise that they were well provided for in the enactments of the brehons. This was especially remarkable where marriage was in question. Irish women, unlike their sisters of Rome and Germany, we are informed by De Jubainville, retained for themselves their marriage dowry and thus provided themselves with a check on masculine tyranny. When her life partner was so unfortunate as to have no property the housewife was the ruling one in the home. Sometimes a less appreciable disparity between the possessions of wife and husband was sufficient to give the former control of domestic affairs if she had a commanding character. This

seems to have been realised in the case of Maeve who occasionally in anger claimed to be superior to her husband. Addressing her lord in the Tain she says:

> "A man upon a woman's maintenance
> Is what thou art, O Ailill."

Maeve's status, however, was not regarded as an ideal to be generally aimed at in married life. "Marry a wife who is your equal" is an aphorism that tells of the wisdom of being mated with a partner who is fitted for one by endowments of wealth and character; yet almost in the same breath another proverb says "rule your wife," implying that the law of nature which gives the human leadership of the household to the husband must not be dethroned. It seems to have been the hope of the Gaelic legislator that this basis of a woman's marriageable suitability for a man whilst not interfering with the proper repository of authority should make for domestic concord by giving the housewife the right to be consulted in all important decisions affecting the home. When her property was equal to her husband's the wedded pair constituted a council of two whose unanimity was necessary for the validity of all such contracts. But no matter what her possessions might have been there were certain contracts into which her husband could not enter without her consent. In the Ancient Laws of Ireland there is evidence of several privileges

accorded to women independently of their wealth. "And every woman in general," says the ancient book, "may give the presents which are mentioned in the book called 'Cin' to her poor friends every year." Besides she could go security for others, make loans and entertain half the number of guests that fell to the lot of her husband to manage at a reception. In a word, the domestic rights and privileges of women were such that masculine absolutism was a very rare occurrence in the homes of ancient Erin for should every safeguard that the law provided fail to keep the evil of incurable discord from the family heads, the mother was free to separate from the father taking with her a fair division of the property. Where such procedure was necessary she found in the laws several reasons to enable her to obtain justice.

And the care that was manifested for the married woman did not surpass that bestowed upon the young lady in anticipation of wedlock. Until her heart and hand merited the protection of some young man she was completely under her father's protection. This was done not for the purpose of curbing her personal liberty but that paternal care might contribute to the preservation of her dignity. For education by fosterage her father was bound to provide and when this reached completion and her nuptial hour approached it was his duty to see that no inferior was honoured by her wedded hand. Age of course

was another important matrimonial factor and that advanced years might not prove an obstacle to a marriageable maiden custom expected the eldest daughter of the family to make her great adventure before her younger sisters showed like daring. Parents could not neglect her even though a younger daughter might possess far greater attractions, for in proportion to their interest in the latter should be their solicitude for the oldest who while unmarried was a stumbling block in the former's road to nuptial success. It has been often objected that parents in Ireland seriously erred by artificially made matches at the great festive gatherings where the individual tastes of the young lady were in no wise consulted. This seems an unjustifiable assumption for there is little positive evidence that the instincts of romance were not taken into account. Parental influence was exerted as far as we can judge as a guiding and corrective rather than a destructive force. It was there to superintend rather than eliminate romance.

As the system of fosterage attended to the education of the young woman within domestic circles so there are grounds for believing that the state had public institutions where a more complete knowledge was imparted. Back in the twilight of the second century we hear of a college at Tara, the seat of national government, solely devoted to the training of the feminine mind. There are records of great female phy-

sicians and lawyers whose proficiency in their professions was not with likelihood acquired by private tutelage. Even if this were possible it is improbable that they would receive governmental recognition without some official guarantee of their ability. Besides, in literature, music and architecture there were several accomplished ladies who in all probability were educated in national institutions. There were many female rhymers and harpists who were recognised throughout the land at the festive and cultural gatherings of the people. In architecture Macha showed the might of her brain in such distinguished fashion that she is worthy of special note. Supposed to have lived three hundred years before the Christian era she planned the historic palace of Emain after her warrior hand had made the throne of Ulster her own. Some idea of the spaciousness and splendour of that edifice may be obtained from the following description: "In the King's house there were three times fifty rooms, and the walls were made of red yew with copper rivets, but in Conor's own room, which was in the front of the house, and large enough for thirty warriors, the walls were inlaid with bronze, wrought with silver on it, and carbuncles and precious stones, and great gold birds, with jeweled eyes, so that day and night were equally light therein."*

* The Romance of Irish Heroines. L. M. McCraith. p. 5.

It was for such intellectual leadership as well as for their strictly feminine graces that women were recognised as one of the prime adornments of every brilliant scene whether it was legislative, literary or festive. In such places they were seated with their own people in the special places set apart for the representatives of their respective tribes. They had also councils of their own from which all men were excluded where subjects solely relating to the welfare of their sex were discussed. Many descriptions of the women present at these purely feminine and mixed assemblies have come down to us. In these the writer usually takes special pains to depict in colourful words the beauty of mind and body that characterised the women folk. Emphasis is laid upon their Celtic sense of honour, the delicate workmanship of nature on their forms and the riot of rich and scintillating colour that dwelt in their apparel.

It is little wonder they were conscious of their dignified position and often exulted in it. It was only where such conditions prevailed that a lady could have the towering self-reliance and hauteur of Maeve when chafing under insult she sought to match her might with a great warrior monarch of her time and supremely humble him.

> "I thought that my high pride of mind and spirit
> Would ne'er recover from this seemed hurt
> Until I should behold red-sworded Conor
> Pale in his death before me."

It was a like spirit that in the Women's War of Words prompted the speech of the lady who gloried in the race that exalted her, in the family of which she was the ornament and in her own intrinsic worth for her nation and her lord. It was this, which was the basis of the custom by which women claimed after wedlock the privilege of being still known by that maiden name which was the hallmark of their family and clan. The nation, indeed, honoured them officially and socially and they manifested to the nation their answering pride and gratitude.

CHAPTER III

The Objects of Men's Reverence

THE Irish woman's sense of self-respect won for her deep reverence from the nation: that attitude of respect was considerably strengthened by the unusual innate bent of the Irishman to protect what is worthy and needful of his guardianship. Religious, speculative, emotional, imaginative and aggressively masculine he has found in woman food for his spiritual appetite, for the idealism that haunts him, for the affectionate impulses of his being, for his hunger for the aesthetic and for his craving to protect the weak and defenceless.

It has been said and with much truth that the world is as much indebted to Ireland for the romantic as it is to Greece for the philosophical and Rome for the juridical. It is equally true to assert that the chivalrous which is so closely associated with the romantic proceeded in its earliest and most conspicuous form from the poetic soul of the western Gael. The most primitive serious attempt to propound with something like completeness, canons regulating knightly conduct is traceable to the Celtic race. Chivalry in the old Irish tales has an importance that can not be

located in the kindred literature of Greece and Rome. It has a prominence that brands it as an outstanding feature of the Gaelic myth while its presence in the classics, may fail to arrest the attention or at least but feebly challenge it.

As one of the mainsprings governing the knightly action of all time has been the idea of service born of the lure of the aesthetic, the desire for self-sacrifice in behalf of some beautiful human being, it is little wonder that the Irishman with his vivid conception of the glory that resides in symmetry of form became an ardent worshipper in the temple of chivalry. "For beauty and amourousness, the Gaels," says an old Irish proverb, maintaining that the aesthetic was the principal objective towards which its emotionalism impelled the heart of the pagan Gael. Perhaps in none of the literatures of the world is there anything like the homage which the Irish paid to the form which beauty inhabited. Minutely painted pictures glowing with the light of an exuberant imaginativeness tell the reader constantly of the lure there was in human beauty for the Celt. Such a description is Cathbad's account of Deirdre whose cheeks were

> "Crimson like fox-gloves, and a faultless treasure
> Of teeth like autumn snow, and two curved lips
> Red like red-rowan fruit o'er shining snow."

Even in a man beauty was adored. This was as much part of Cuchulainn as his might of arm.

In the Intoxication of the Ultonians the warriors would not "wound him because of his beauty," for according to a proverb, beauty as well as wealth and worth was cogent enough to transform the hatred of an enemy into love. Aye, over the very sprites of the viewless world it could cast its spell for when Carmun died the hosts of fairy hovered over her prostrate form to sing their weird laments desiring because of the "delight of her beauty to keen and raise the first wailing over her." The aesthetic in fact all over the broad face of nature, animate as well as inanimate, appealed to the old Irish. Moy Mel, their pagan Elysium, as depicted in the sagas is a bewildering maze of scintillating beauty where everything is crowned with loveliness from the trees in perennial bloom to the maiden mated with all the glories that flesh and blood and gorgeous robes can confer.

Impelled by this idealism men went to great lengths to serve the fair sex. Respect for woman was part of the knightly vow of Red Branch and Fenian heroes. No matter how tumultuous the anger that vexed the soul of Cuchulainn, a suppliant woman could dispel by song or prayer the fury that raged within him. He was wont to speak of the honour of his wife as one of the dearest things in life to him. He considered the "precedence of his wife over all Ultonia's ladies" as worthy of his ambition as the sovereignty of Erin and the champion's portion. He put her highest

interests on the same plane as the attainment of that pride of position and honour for which his soul most hungered. For the mere sake of giving pleasure to ladies he oftentimes performed deeds of wonder. Once as he was faring to royal Cruachan in the west with a gentlemanly instinct that is quite modern he executed special feats to destroy the monotony of the journey for some fair attendants. It was such courtesy which doubtless contributed to his being of "victory-loving women beloved." Men were prepared to go to any extreme, even to the point of losing their lives for the sake of a lady's fair regard. Witness the promise of love of the diplomatic Findabair, daughter of Maeve, forging battle-fury in the hearts of heroes in an episode of the Tain. The very terms they used when speaking of their wives told of a striking delicacy of attitude towards women in an age of untamed prehistoric vigour. When Goll bade farewell to his wife he spoke of her as the "clear one of rosy cheeks" and "gentle one of red lips" whose soulful songs coming from the "red mouth that was musical" so often brought peace to his heart.

Not only did men act through this inspiration with special zest under the impulse of duty or politeness but they sometimes seemed neglectful of patriotic and other principles when seized by its intoxicating influence. Cuchulainn himself who was always so unswerving on the path of honour momentarily neglected his staunch loyalty

to his beloved Uladh out of tender feeling for Maeve. With diplomatic acuteness she pitted his sense of chivalry against his warrior zeal for Ulster appealing to him to shield her retreating army even though it was his foe, and she proved victor. At the Feast of Bricriu the very ring of the contending voices of women was capable of generating in a warrior band a lust for battle that was more instinctive than rational. With aimless rage they swung their mighty swords and dealt stout blows to one another knowing no prompting motive save that in some confused way they felt their ladies grieved. Their passionate tumult seemed a natural responsive echo to the excited cries of their women folk. It was this spiritual chivalry too, which gave the Gael the idea of making mortal man seek a fairy lover whom in defiance of nature's dictates and manly tradition, he should be content to recognise as his superior within his homestead.

When these canons of chivalry were violated by a man, popular sentiment marked him out as fated for bitterness. A standard example of the curse thus supposed to fall upon the erring one was that which overtook the whole province of Ulster for a display of serious rudeness towards a lady. The blight of a perennial malediction rested on the Ulstermen for forcing Macha in her travail to vie in speed with a racing chariot. Thus was a tradition embedded in ancient lore that a periodic debility overcame the inhabitants of a

whole province for want of gentleness to a woman that it might be a signal warning to all the land that in the sanctum of the Irish heart the fair sex held a shrine protected by most precious safeguards and any serious slight offered to its dignity would be punished as a sacrilege before the high altar of the national honour.

But the nation went still further along the way of idealism when paying its homage to women. She was given an honoured niche within the temple of the national cult where the most sacred and symbolic treasures of the race were guarded. Men saw in her so much of the wine of national inspiration and realised that she embodied in an emphatic manner so much of what was characteristically Celtic that they elevated her to the realm wherein she became the mystic and luminous symbol of their land and the pure, white, delicate object of the amourous cravings of all patriotic spirits.

Some samples of these mystic imaginings are worthy of production here. When Niall, son of Eocaid, in the daring of his heart went through the ordeal of accepting a kiss from a mysterious hag of dreadful mien his courage was repaid by a most pleasing change in the appearance of this creature. The hideous form that confronted him vanished, supplanted by that of a maiden of surpassing loveliness. The wonderful metamorphosis was seemingly effected to convey the lesson that

those who wish for the cherished affection of the great lady, Eire, whom this figure symbolised, must shirk no horrors for her sake. "I am the sovereignty of Erin," said the new wooer of Niall. She is described as having "two blunt shoes of white bronze between her little snow-white feet and the ground. A costly full-purple mantle she wore, with a broach of white silver in the clothing of the mantle. Shining pearly teeth she had, an eye large and queenly, and lips red as rowan-berries."

Other striking evidence exists of the use of woman as a symbol of Ireland. The ancient name of Ireland is identical with that of a mythical goddess or queen and the attributes of this lady have frequently been applied in mystic language to that country. This fascinating conception has roamed through the souls of poets and called forth the fine-frenzied expression of their visions for centuries. Some of the most heart-searching verses of the land have had this tender mysticism as their highest and most enduring note. See what passionate tenderness lives in the lines of Fergusin's Cean Duv Deelish, symbolic of Ireland, as they tell of the pure fire of the patriot lover for the Dear Black Head.

"Put your head darling, darling, darling,
Your darling black head my heart above;
O mouth of honey with the thyme for fragrance,
Who with heart in breast could deny you love?

O many and many a young girl for me is pining,
Letting her locks of gold to the cold winds free,
For me, the foremost of the gay young fellows,
But I'd leave a hundred, pure love for thee."

Look at the exquisite intermingling of wrestling sorrow and buoyant hope that subsists beneath the glowing passion of Shiela-Ni-Gara, the songful symbol of Ethna Carbery.

Shiela-Ni-Gara, it is lonesome where you bide,
With plovers circling over and the sagans spreading wide,
With an empty sea before you and behind a wailing world,
Where the sword lieth rusty and the banner blue is furled.

Is it a sail you wait, Shiela? Yea, from the westering sun.
Shall it bring you joy or sorrow? Oh! joy gladly won.
Shall it bring peace or conflict? The pibroch in the glen
And the flash and crash of battle round a host of fighting men.

Green spears of hope rise round you like grass blades after drouth
And there grows a white wind from the East, a red wind from the South
A brown wind from the West, Agra, a brown wind from the West —
But the black winds from the Northern hills—how can you love it best?

Said Shiela-Ni-Gara, " 'Tis a kind wind and true,
For it rustled soft through Aeleach's halls and stirred
the hair of Hugh
Then blow wind and snow wind! What matters storm
to me
Now I know the fairy sleep must break and set the
sleepers free."

Thus have writers thought in prose or sung in poetry from the earliest historic days of Ireland's story until the present time. This note of inspiration has been especially distinct after the Anglo-Norman invasion in the Jacobite songs of the eighteenth century and the meditative verses of the nineteenth and twentieth century Celtic Renaissance literature. These periods have been remarkable for a resurgence of Celtism and it is noteworthy that the prominence of woman as a symbol should have entered so intimately into the warp and woof of literary thought in its typically racial phases. We shall present to the reader one more example of this symbolic verse and we believe ourselves pardonable in doing so, for it is one of the most recent and sublimely inspired poems of that type that has yet appeared. It comes from the pen of Joseph Mary Plunkett who in Easter Week of 1916 gave his life for Ireland. Its intense personal feeling and apparent note of destiny exalt its literary qualities to the level of first class poetry. Addressed to Cathleen Ni Houlihan, its title is The Little Black Rose shall be Red at Last.

"Because we share our sorrows and our joys
And all your dear and intimate thoughts are mine
We shall not fear the trumpets and the noise
Of battle, for we know our dreams divine,
And when my heart is pillowed on your heart
And ebb and flow of their passionate flood
Shall beat in concord love through every part
Of brain and body—when at last the blood
O'er leaps the final barrier to find
Only one source wherein to spend its strength
And we two lovers, long but one in mind
And soul, are made one only flesh at length;
Praise God if this my blood fulfils the doom
When you dark rose, shall redden into bloom."

There is yet another department of Irish tradition which cannot be neglected in dealing with the process of Gaelic idealism of woman; that is fairy lore. In this there is abundant material whence the student of folk-lore may extract the most honeyed thought relative to the adoring attitude of the Irish towards the feminine world. The realm of spirits is peopled with attractive maidens who combine the sublimity and winning elusiveness of creatures of intangible essence with most human attributes. Woman is spiritualised in them without being dehumanised.

From the misty land of immortal beauty came these spirit-maidens to woo the souls of men. One of the most fascinating of all spirit lovers in all literature is Etain the Beloved. With beauty of form transcending far the best that earth could boast of, she came to make a certain Midir a

prisoner in the net of her loveliness. With promises that were seductive, but pure, she told him that with her he would find all that was fairest in colour, most enduring in joy and attractive in melody in the mystery land whence she came. "O fair one, wilt thou come with me," she said, "to a wonderful land that is mine, a land of sweet music; there primrose blossoms on the hair, and snow-white the bodies from head to toe. There no one is sorrowful or silent; white the teeth there, black the eyebrows . . . . . the hue of the fox-glove on every cheek." Her appeal proved resistless. Bound together in deathless bondage with a silvery chain between them the amorous pair left the land of Erin in the transfigured shape and grace of two white swans for the scenes of their paradisal honeymoon.

The same lady in the History of Ailill and Etain, won the heart of Eochaid, King of Ireland. Here, too, despite her spirit nature she was Irish and feminine for she loved the monarch for his skill as a raconteur and the splendid symmetry of his form. Strong and resistless as the growing strength of a hurricane was the affection this fairy lover aroused within Eochaid. Its limits were unknown, its power almost effaced individuality and the end towards which it tended was the ecstatic freedom of the spirit. In the quaint, pithy and fanciful concreteness of the olden writer it was "deeper every year . . . . endless like the sky . . . . . a battle against a shade . . . . . a drowning in

water . .. a course to heaven . . . . a love to an echo.'' We wonder not at this love-distress of the King when we read the rapturous description of Etain in the Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel. Her beauty gleamed with the purity of azure skies and the cold glory of a northern landscape. ''White as the snow of one night were the two hands . . . . and as red as fox-glove were the two clear-beautiful cheeks. Dark as the back of a stag-beetle the two eyebrows. Like a shower of pearls were the teeth in her head. Blue as a hyacinth were the eyes. Red as rowan-berries the lips . . . . The bright radiance of the moon was in her noble face: the loftiness of pride in her smooth eyebrows: the light of wooing in her regal eyes . . . . Verily of the world's women 'tis she was the dearest and loveliest and justest that the eyes of man had ever beheld.''*

Spirits other than messengers of love were also pictured as women. Death was represented by an optimistic people as a beautiful maiden stripped of everything that might be forbidding and clothed with the richest tints of fancy. In reality she was regarded as an envoy of veiled love for the happy nature of the Celt always beheld the brightness of God's smile behind the darkest clouds of life. There is every reason to believe that he looked with eyes of affection on the messenger who came to lead him through the dark way to the glory of the unseen world with

* Revue Celtique. Vol. 22. pp. 15-16.

which in spirit he was so familiar. It was to Moy Mel he hoped to go whether the entry thereto was through the gates of life or death. Once arrived there, no matter how he journeyed thither, unfailing life was to be his. Whether the lure of beauty or the voice of death called him to the Isles of the Blessed, "the Land of Women," the personage who accompanied him thither was always a maiden whose soul spoke of love in the mystic land where the best of his race should receive its supreme reward.

CHAPTER IV

Feminine Morality in Pagan Days

BEFORE we leave the days of heroic story one of the brightest features of that epoch must claim our attention. The flower of highest grade in the garden of Irish womanhood has yet to display its glory to us. That flower is the splendid fealty of the women of the ancient Gael to moral principles.

Some sayings exist which are indicative of the Irish feminine sense of moral honour, and the Gael seldom elevated a dictum to the plane of a proverb which he did not regard as capable of verification in his national life. It was for him as rationally sacrosanct as an axiom for "it is impossible to contradict a proverb." Some of these treasured sayings we will quote. One of them makes purity a woman's prime asset, for, it states that "modesty is the beauty of women." The other synthesises the glories of a woman as embracing a "proud spirit," a spirit that accepts no dishonour, as well as physical shapeliness.

That there was a basis justifying the race which formulated such proverbs as applicable to women we have every reason to believe. Emer, the wife of Cuchulainn, was given premier place in the

world by Bricriu on account of the goodness of her reputation. We have the extraordinary spectacle of a pagan maiden the daughter of Aengus, seeking perfection of continence for she loved "the lot of virginity." There are instances of heroic fortitude and infinite delicacy of conscience associated with the preservation of this virtue. Fial was said to have purchased death for herself through pangs resulting from a sheer sense of shame when her modesty was in peril. A certain Luaine met a similar fate because of an insult offered to her for "she died of shame and bashfulness." A maid named Gile on whom masculine eyes accidentally fell as she bathed "died of shame and found death in the well." Eithne, we are told, was miraculously sustained in life by the true God without partaking of any food, as a reward for her purity. When Ailill wooed and won Etain another mysterious intervention is supposed to have saved her when her honour was seriously menaced.

So characteristic was this feminine virtue that the greatest in Ireland regarded it as essential in a marriageable woman. It was the fidelity of Emer to her husband that roused his spell-bound spirit from the enthrallment of the fairy Fand as with tear-strewn face she besought him to be faithful to one who had been loyal to him. And he was true to Emer when he remembered that one of the arch qualities for which he grew enamoured of her was her love of maiden honour.

When Art, son of Conn, in a fairy island "full of wild apples and lovely birds, with little bees ever beautiful on the tops of the flowers" met a maiden who captured his fancy and was deemed worthy to be his wife she was one "fair . . . . in chastity." Eochaid would not have Etain when he sought her hand merely because of her sensuous appeal to him; he demanded that she have steadfastness and honour. "With thee alone will I live," he exclaimed, "so long as thou hast honour."

So sacred, indeed, did women deem the marriage bond that rather than be untrue to their wedded lords they welcomed death itself if it saved them from dishonour. When the sword of Conall Cernach overcame Mesgegra the wife of the doomed hero, true to his memory and her womanhood, surrendered her spirit to her God rather than sacrifice her good name. With a mighty effort of soul she rent her heart asunder for in the quaint words of the writer she lifted up "her cry of lamentation . . . . and she cast herself backwards and she dead." Even the mere memory of a deceased husband was sometimes sufficient to force a widow to pay the toll of death. This supreme sacrifice was regarded as a fitting recognition of the unbounded affection that dwelt in the soul of the Gaelic wife for her husband. Almu died of grief for the one that wed her and the arrows of love were fatal to Etar when she saw her dead lord in a dream.

So highly did the nation value this virtue of its womanhood that it ordained grievous penalties for those who tarnished it. A grave offense in this matter was sometimes deemed sufficient to deprive a monarch of his throne. This happened in the case of Mac Da Cherda who was considered unworthy to preside over his people since he knew not how to respect what the people most revered. Within the province of Ulster anyone who brought to shame a maiden soul had to face the withering ire of Cuchulainn for "every maiden and every single woman that was in Ulster, they were in his ward till they were ordained for husbands." One of Ireland's greatest national woes had its origin in an insult offered to a woman. Its story is replete with suffering. The daughter of Tuahal of Meath married the King of Leinster. The latter, tiring of his wife, sought the hand of her sister Fithir under the pretence that he was a widower. His base scheme was successful until Fithir arrived at his palace. Then learning how cruelly she had been victimized she lost her life in a sea of shame. But Leinster paid a terrible price for the deed. It was compelled to give a constant tribute to the Ard-Ri as a penitential recompense, an exaction which spelt destruction for national solidarity for many a day.

But punishment for woman's infidelity was not always confined to men. If she had been a willing victim of crime the law demanded that she suffer for her action. Occasionally the wildest barbaric

wrath was loosed against such hapless creatures. To cite but one example, in the Battle of Cnucha we find a fierce old chieftain condemning to the tortures of the fiery stake the mother of Finn whom he adjudged guilty of impurity.

That the mind of the race demanded and was cognisant of this prime adornment of womanhood is apparent even in the descriptive passages of the tales which are concerned with women and are steeped in an atmosphere of purity. The Tain presents us with a picture of Fedelm, the fairy prophetess, which illustrates our contention.

". . . . . Folded round her shape,
A bratt of leafy green, chequered and pied
Was held by a full fruit-like, heavy clasp
Over her breast. Her face was rosy bright.
Her eyes were laughing, blue; and her two lips
Were shapely, thin and red. Within her lips
Her teeth were glistering, pearly — glimmering —
One might have deemed a white rain shower of pearls
Had rained in there. Her bright long yellow hair
Divided; three gold tresses of it wound
About her head; another long, gold tress
Fell round her . . . . . .

Her nails were trim and sharp and crimson-stained,
Whiter than snow in one night softly fallen,
The whiteness of her flesh was, where it shined
And gleamed athwart her quivering, blown apparel." *

There is nothing of the sensual in this but a cold brilliancy and richness that is suggestive of

* p. 94. Mary A. Hutton.

the vigorous beauty of northern lands rather than the enervating glory of southern climes. Though oriental in its riot of glistening, bewitching colour its rays of influence reach us through a crystal, chastening atmosphere. There is something of an elemental freshness in it which smacks of the wild freedom of Celtic breeses that have no wantonness but soothing tenderness.

If an explanation is to be sought for this moral rectitude of Ireland's daughters no surer reason can be found than their devotion to the principles of home life. The domestic circle was the nursery where the seedlings of the national oak of Irish feminine purity were planted and cared for.

To verify this we have only to consider how devoted woman was in the old Gaelic home to her husband. This is the acid test of feminine domestic rectitude and the pivotal point round which most of the family happiness revolves. Without it there is an influence absent which is absolutely essential for true family life.

Over and over again instances of deep matronly and domestic instincts can be encountered in the heroines of the tales. This sense of domesticity shone most clearly in the sense of bereavement which women manifested when their husbands entered the shadowland of death. Take for example the lament of Crede, so expressive of incurabe loss, when she consigned to the grave her life-mate. The simplicity of her words coupled with their ebb and flow of repetition produces a

note of sincerity clearly indicative of great and lasting woe. "Sore suffering and O suffering sore is the hero's death, his death who used to lie by me." The same sentiment is seen in the lament of Emer over Cuchulainn when the fatal spear slew her valiant lord. Raising a keen over him she let the waves of distress inundate her soul and died in the clasp of a sea of grief.

In other respects, also, the importanceof woman's household position was apparent. One of the qualities of Emer most highly lauded by her husband was her proficiency in attending to the simple art of home business: and Cuchulainn seldom praised but what was great and impressive as a national asset. The same lady won laudatory remarks from Bricriu for the wisdom that adorned her domestic life. In the War of Words we have already seen that the cause of feminine agitation was solicitude for the happiness of their husbands on the part of the women and the belief of each noble dame that her lord had no peer in all the land. Herein Emer lauds her husband with imaginative exuberance giving him a countenance like unto the sun and a soul dowered with a nobility that no other mortal possessed. There is a world of primitive conjugal affection in Goll when he bade his wife farewell. With barbaric crudeness he mingled his blood with hers to show how thorough and fundamental he believed her loyalty to him to be and how in payment for that affection no nuptial promises to any other woman should

ever stain his manhood. The name of the river Liffey perpetuates the memory of a woman, Life, whose loyalty to her lord was so striking that his mourning heart burst in twain as a tribute to her fidelity.

Though we have not been attempting to convey the idea that Irish women in the olden days were perfect or anything approaching that, we did wish to maintain that in what we have produced there is evidence of a singularly high moral standard in their lives considering the dim beacon of religious guidance that their pagan faith provided. Furthermore, in the light of this contention, we think ourselves justified in believing that the facts substantiating moral laxity and disrespect for women are not sufficiently weighty to warrant a serious attack upon the exalted virtue of the fair sex of pagan Ireland.

In spite of the fact that the tales provide many instances of concubinage we must admit that it was mainly prevalent in the ranks of the nobility. Whilst its presence amongst the common people is but very meagerly attested the lofty principles governing sex relations are so frequently encountered and so soaring in dignity that they could not be accounted for, had not the roots of national life been embedded in a soil of very considerable practical morality. Abduction, indeed, was rather frequent, but it was rather the outcome of sheer wildness of the primitive spirit that loved bravado and acts that tried the soul of courage than a han-

kering for things that were sensual. Besides, with the seizure was always intertwined a fight for the honour of the smuggled woman which proved the battling mettle and uprightness of the defending party as well as the unrestrained spirit of the abductor. Aodh, for instance, in the Abduction of Eargna, roused by the banter of Finn fought a fierce dual with Conan who sought by violent means to woo a maiden.

Hence we cannot accept Pflugk-Hartung's statement that "the position of the wife and daughter" in ancient Ireland "was one of supreme subjection" in a moral or a fortiore in a social sense. True, indeed, statements hostile in a general way to womanhood are to be found in Irish literature but these should not invite serious prejudice against it. Such as these are discoverable in all literature and in Irish letters any unfavourable attitude they might create should be practically eliminated by the vastly superior array of fine tributes lined up in support of the ladies of the Gael. Besides some of these when contextually interpreted do not seem to be uttered in a serious mood but were dictated by the racial desire for pungent wit and rich humour.

Just to give some idea of what they were like we will produce a few of them here. From a piece called Eve's Lament we take the excerpt "so long as they endure in the light of day, so long women will not cease from folly." This condemnation is so vague that it carries with it no special bitterness

and leaves only the impression of minor deficiencies rather than any damning vices. The command rings out "rule your wife," but this is merely equivalent to advocating a preservation of the natural social order of the homestead. Perhaps some of the most blighting of all anti-feminine dicta are those ascribed to King Cormac in his instructions to his son Carbery. "Silly counsellors," he calls all womankind: "steadfast in hate, forgetful of love, on the pursuit of folly, bad among the good, worse among the bad." The condemnatory character of this advice is so sweeping and universal that by the very force of its exaggeration it dispels all likelihood of veracity. Another says "do not give your wife authority over you, for if you let her stamp on your foot to-night, she will stamp on your head to-morrow." This seems bitter until we read in the same text "reprove your wife as you would your son or your friend:" then one feels that its harshness is only apparent and formulated with a view to impress forcibly the need of preserving nature's authority in the home. Taking, then, evidence as a whole into account there seems to be vastly more truth in the words of M. Gaston Paris when he praises that loyalty of the Irishwoman to the dictates of morality which would be impossible under the slavish conditions imposed upon her by Pflugk-Hartung. "The oldest Irish literature," says the French Celtist, "furnishes evidence of the fidelity of the betrothed to her lover, of the

wife to the husband and of the widow to her dead mate, whom she laments and to whom she remains faithful."* There were dark spots in the sunlight of Irish pagan morality as in everything on earth but the gloom they induce was of little account when compared with the brilliancy that enveloped them.

* Rev. Celt. Vol. 15. p. 407.

CHAPTER V

When Saints Were Numerous

LEAVING the golden grey of saga landscape we now pass on to scenes more definite and historical in feature though scarcely less illumined by the glorifying aureole of the romantic. We go from the glamour of the pagan period to the captivating beauty and innocence of the neophyte nation newly introduced to the mysteries of christianity. Here we shall behold how when the message of the Master's Gospel rang out over the hills and dales of Erin and the people with longing hearts hearkened to its welcome notes, the women of the Gael were throbbing with ardour for the treasure that had appeared in their midst. They furnished some of the most saintly minds of the early church and some of the most capable spirits that were allied with sanctity in that youthful institution.

That greatness of intellect and valuable material for citizenship should go hand in hand with saintliness was naturally to be expected. The qualities that forged the way towards christian perfection were those which were fundamentally necessary for national wholesomeness. Respect for authority, justice, sobriety, self-denial and purity

of life which are always associated with those who seek first the Kingdom of God, are the soundest pillars of any kingdom that man may construct. Their absence can only be justified by materialism of outlook and the nation that has only this vision is fetid at the core and doomed to an early death. Their presence means the controlling hand of idealism at the nation's helm, a force that must lead it triumphantly against all brute influences into final success.

This effectiveness of the saint as a national factor was especially appreciable in Ireland. The dominant note of early Celtic christianity was monastic and this was closely associated with the social and governmental machinery that prevailed in the commonwealth. The system upon which Irish civilisation was erected was that of tribalism. With the government of the church rigidly fashioned after and largely dependent on this it was only natural to expect a considerable mingling of interest between church and state and a marked unanimity of purpose in the pursuit of the ideals of both organizations. The limits of the diocese which was ruled by a monastic head had to be coterminous with those of the tribe-lands. The head of the monastery had to be selected from some member of the clan so that the bond of blood gave him an interest in the temporalities as well as the spiritual needs of the people over whom he presided. Other affinities existed between the ecclesiastical and civil institutions all

of which tended to make the fire of the love of God breeding-ground for the fire of patriotism in the soul of the saint.

What was true of the tribal character of the monastery for men was likewise verified in its kindred establishment for women. The convent was an intimate part of tribal life whilst the importance of its inmates was augmented by their feminine hold upon the racial sense of reverence for woman as well as by its official connection with the existing mode of civilisation. Its inmates wielded a powerful influence as women of the Gael and as Irish saints.

Though countless numbers of Irish maidens are to be met with in the early days of the church's history who showed in their lives a sublimity worth recording we must content ourselves with presenting the few whose careers are in a marked degree representative of those of the many.

To begin with Patrician times we find that some of the most attractive episodes in the life of the national apostle were based on the guileless character and lofty ideals of women. In these first fruits reaped by the great reaper there was, as it were, a symbolic guarantee of the elevating influence which the christian daughters to come would wield within the land of Erin. In the western part of the country two maiden figures, fresh as the flowers of the field and taintless as unstained rivulets, were wafted in upon the pathway of the missionary as if to refresh his weary

soul and give him the strength of a magnificent hope in the christian future of the nation that could present such early flowers to the garden of the Lord. Of royal birth they were and of royal mind as was well shown in their thirst for truth and the effusive manner in which Patrick willed to satisfy their well-meant curiosity. He was questioned as to the nature of his God: he told them that He was the Being who would satisfy the demand of their Celtic natures by the expression of his power and grandeur through the energy and beauty of all that their senses perceived in the spaces of the heavens and the expanses of the earth, His God made the rushing waters of the river, the light of the sun, the beauty of the sleeping valleys, the majesty of the adoring mountains and the isleted gems of the sea.

On another occasion the daughter of Daire brought an element of romance into the story of early Irish christianity which though earthly was pure and merited to be elevated by the prayers of the apostle to the realm of the supernatural. With Patrick always went Benignus whom he loved for his innocence and sweet singing and it was this youth whose attractions won the affection of an Irish maiden. So violent did her love for him become that a deadly sickness settled upon her. Patrick saved her life, purified her affections and directed them into heavenly channels. Her passion was terrestrial but untainted and Patrick deemed it worthy of transformation into

supernatural fidelity to the Supreme Lover. Her awakening from the spells of worldly love is preserved in verse for us by Aubrey De Vere.

". . . . . One day through grief of love
The Maiden lay as dead; Benignus shook
Dews from the fount above her, and she woke,
With heart emancipate that outsoared the lark,
Lost on the blue heavens. She loved the Spouse of souls."

In another woman we are provided with a splendid example of that spirit of self-sacrifice which is so necessary for working of christian principles in the human soul. This was the wife of Laoghaire, the High King of Ireland. Though the monarch refused to desert the pagan religion his wife embraced the new faith and manifested her gratitude to the apostle for the gift he had given her by a permanent donation to the church. "She bound herself to give a sheep out of every flock she possessed each year and a portion of every meal she should take during her life to the poor of God."* A like tribute to the church she ordained every property owner in Ireland should give.

That these were not exceptions in their virtuous behaviour we know from the testimony of Patrick himself. He states that the women of Ireland in general displayed a magnificent attitude towards the new message of self-sacrifice that he brought

* Irish Texts Society. Vol. 9. p. 41.

them. He tells how in spite of all opposition they unhesitatingly became christians and lived up to the teachings of their new faith in the midst of temptation. "Their parents," those remaining pagans, no doubt, "instead of approving of it, persecute and load them with obloquy; yet their number increases constantly; and, indeed, of all those that have been thus born in Christ, I cannot give the number, besides those living in holy widowhood, and keeping continency in the midst of the world."*

There is another name which was closely associated with that of Patrick but which needed no such distinguished affiliation to enable it to endure in history. That is the name of Brigid which was held by the premier member of Ireland's early saintly womanhood. Her memory is as much part and parcel of the national and ecclesiastical tradition as is that of Patrick himself. Interest and pride in her glory is confined within no provincial limitations but maintain an equal hold upon every section of the country. Her name when borne by a woman is regarded in foreign parts as distinct a badge of Irish origin as is that of the national apostle when its honours a man.

A potent reason for this universal esteem for Brigid is the fact that though wedded to Heaven she was never divorced from Ireland. She was not that type of saint whose celestial tendencies make mental absentees from the ordinary life of

* The Irish Race, Aug. Thebaud. Quotation. p. 36.

earth. She was as practical in citizenship as she was mystic in religion.

When the blood of her countrymen became stirred and heated for action her love of peace and her liberal conception of nationalism inspired her to hesitate at no saintly effort that might heal wounded pride and introduce serenity where serious strife might have been. For this reason great men sought her aid. She was visited by Conall, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, who sought her protection against his brother Carbery whose malice menaced him for the sake of a kingdom. With a solicitude that was truly maternal mingled with an element of romanc that was mediaeval she covered with her protecting presence the troops of Conall as they marched to the field of battle. A clash was frustrated and the would-be contestants were compelled to depart with a kiss of peace whilst the name of Brigid as a peacemaker and a benefactor of the policy of national unity was universally applauded.

However where diplomacy failed to adjust a dispute on a basis of fairness she was not the one to prevent the arms of the warrior seeking a vindication of principle. On this same Conall for whom she obtained peace from Carbery she afterwards bestowed her benediction and relying on its sustaining power he led his men to triumph on the field of strife. In the Battle of Allen a singular tale is narrated which, whatever its worth may be in the realm of sober history, is decidedly in-

teresting as a medium for the study of the national belief in Brigid's local patriotism. Herein as a Leinster woman she championed the cause of her native province against external aggression, and though her action may not redound to her credit as a nationalist because of its encouragement of provincial strife it showed the warmth of her tribal sentiments which amongst the Gael as a race were the secret of intellectual national unity even though they were a stumbling block in the way of the organic solidarity of the commonwealth. The followers of the O'Neill were waging war on the men of Leinster whilst in the language of Whitley Stokes "Columbkille and Brigid" were "heartening, like Homeric heroes their respective clans in battle." As the tide of conflict ebbed and flowed, according to the old writer, great was the agitation of the saintly scion of the race of Niall who feared with a great fear when he perceived that the great woman of Kildare was pitted against his Ulster clansmen. "Now in that battle the mind of Columbkille did not rest or stay for the Hy Neill, for above the battalion of Leinster he saw Brigid terrifying the hosts of Conn's half." Thus did the popular imagination summon her from the realm of the dead to shield the martial honour of the province she loved so well in life and to match her saintly influence against that of Columbkille, the most noted masculine saint of Irish stock.

In more reposeful scenes than these Brigid won

renown. Ireland in her day was noted far beyond its shores for the hospitality of its people. The providing of good cheer for the friend and the stranger was long the custom there before the coming of Patrick and the monastic usage of maintaining a public guest-house did not accomplish a social revolution in the life of the Gael but simply gave the sanction of religion to a well-established habit. Hospitality was a part of the business of the state; it was the glory of the palace and the pride of the humblest home. Brigid as the head of a great monastery shone as the dispenser of good cheer and as an entertainer of guests. She received with the kindliness native to her race men distinguished for spirituality, statecraft and various branches of learning whilst the sunshine of her comforting smile warmed the cold hearts of the poor and the outcast. Kings sought her counsel and favour and bishops learned wisdom at her feet whilst erring ones went away consoled.

Even for literature she found time despite all her responsibilities. A poem in her native tongue on 'The Virtues of St. Patrick' is attributed to her. In prose she is supposed to have written a small treatise entitled 'The Quiver of Divine Love' and an Epistle to St. Aid of Degill. She encouraged others to love letters and by her advice and example helped to make the monastery of Kildare as remarkable for its culture as for its piety.

It is, however, in religion that her supreme hold upon the mentality of the Gael is rooted. Her name, with that of Patrick and Columbkille, has always been accepted as completing that trinity of Ireland's greatest saints and as sacred to tradition as the memory of the most successful of national apostles and that of the noblest of the Hy Neill who had the most patriotic heart that ever beat within the bosom of a saint. Thus have the Irish people erected through Brigid an enduring memorial in their literature and tradition to one of the noblest of their womankind, to one who so proudly partook of the work of developing the highest aspect of the national mentality, its keenness of vision of the spiritual world. Actuated by such a desire we find a writer in the Leabar Breac paying a rapturous tribute to the surpassing mastery of things spiritual that was Brigid's heritage. "There was not in the world one of more bashfulness of modesty than this holy virgin . . . . . She was abstinent, unblemished, fond of prayer, patient, rejoicing in God's commands, benevolent, forgiving, charitable . . . . . And hence in things created her type is the Dove among birds, the Vine among the trees, and the sun above the stars."* She was regarded, above all, as the national protectress of that virtue so treasured by Ireland, purity. In the Felire of Aengus, all the virgins of Ireland were confided to the protection of Brigid that in her inspiring example

* Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars. Healy. Quot. p. 135.

they might find that feminine nobility necessary for the welfare of their souls and the moral soundness of the commonwealth.

As an ecclesiastical ruler she also did much to make her name endure in the religious traditions of Ireland. Many houses of piety outside the monastery of Kildare obeyed the Brigidine rule, while evidence is not lacking for the assumption that she and some of her successors invaded the domain of church officialdom proper to men and claimed in some respects the obedience due to high dignitaries. It seems very likely that some of the Abbesses of Kildare enjoyed marked jurisdiction within the diocese of that name in things that pertained to the episcopal office. On the authority of Archbishop Healy we have it that "the lady-abbesses of Kildare enjoyed a kind of primacy over all the nuns of Ireland and, moreover, were in some sense independent of episcopal jurisdiction, if indeed, the Bishops of Kildare were not to some extent dependent on them."*

And even if all these facts of ancient times were consigned to oblivion the vital influence of her memory in the world of the modern Gael would be quite sufficient to prove that the personality from which it emanated centuries ago must have been a commanding one. Irish manhood remembers her as the acme of glory of its womanhood and it feels stronger and more sanguine

* Ibid. p. 137.

every day in the face of all difficulties bolstered up by the sustaining reflection that the companions of its joy and sorrow and ultimate triumph is the feminine factor of which Brigid is the spiritual and patriotic archetype. Multitudes of societies pledged to the support of the twin ideals of faith and nationality act under the patronage of her protection. Her memory survives in the names of a host of parishes and townlands throughout the country. Churches, ancient and modern, within and beyond the seas of Ireland preserve her name. The very topography of Ireland conspires to keep the memory of Brigid ever fresh in the soul of the Gael. Her holy fountains strew the land where her devotees come in crowds to seek her healing power for wound of soul and body. In a word all that lives of her in the Gaelic memory helps to wield with powerful force the hammer that drives home conviction of woman's domineering part in the spiritual regeneration of the Irish race. It tells too of the need of unswerving adherence to the spiritual tenets of Brigid for the preservation of sterling nationality for it shows the potency of a woman to help that essentially Celtic attribute of immaterialism of outlook which has ultimately wrested many and many a time the nation from its death grasp, and preserved intact its corporate sense of racial distinctness and individuality. It is a reminder that the nation which for six and a half centuries,

according to Cambrensis, kept a mysterious fire continually burning at Kildare in honour of Brigid, has still the fire of admiration in its heart for one of its greatest benefactors.

Another saintly woman who bore a striking resemblance to the great one of Kildare was St. Ita, the Mary of Munster. Of illustrious lineage she proved herself in the assumed humility of her life to possess a magnitude of soul exceeding that of any of her ancestors. She loved the things of the spirit but did not cut herself adrift from the mundane things of her island home. She was a saint not only for heaven but for Ireland and sought to give a spiritual elevation to the temporal activities of her countrymen. When the Hy-Conall clan appealed to her for victory in battle, won by affection for her kin and the unsullied honour of her tribe, she girt the clansmen around with the conquering weapons of her prayers.

For learning, too, she had a strong desire. In the Felire there lives a beautiful hymn of which she was the author. It reveals a rare simplicity of soul, a touching familiarity of treatment of the spiritual and the Celtic tribalism of conception which intertwines happily with warmth of feeling.

"Little Jesus, little Jesus,
Shall be nursed by me in my dear Disert:
Though a cleric may have many jewels,
All is deceit but little Jesus.

A nurseling I nurse in my house,
It is not the nurseling of a low-born clown,
It is Jesus with his heavenly host,
That I press to my heart each night.

The fair Jesus, my good life,
Demands my care and resents neglect
The King who is Lord of all,
To pray him not we shall be sorry.

It is Jesus, the noble, the angelical,
Not at all a tear-worn cleric,
That is nursed by me in my dear Disert,
Jesus, the Son of the Hebrew maiden.

The sons of chiefs, the sons of Kings,
Into my district though they may come,
It is not from them that I expect wealth,
More hopeful for me is my little Jesus.

Make ye peace, O daughters,
With him to whom your fair tributes are due,
He rules in his mansion above us,
Though he be little Jesus in my lap.''

And as she loved learning for herself so she desired to communicate it to others, and her efforts in this respect produced some very notable results. To mention but one there is St. Brendan. For his early mental development she was responsible. Thus was she intellectual mother of as masterly and daring a soul as early christian Ireland can claim. As fearless of the elements as he was strong in virtue he cared not for the terrors

of the Atlantic. Drawn on by that peculiar desire of the Celt to probe the depths of the unknown he is credited with being bold and clever enough to have probably discovered America by the very crude means at his disposal. No doubt much of that vigour of mind and manliness was the product of the fostering care of Ita and we cannot help feeling that if she accomplished nothing else her share in the development of Brendan would be sufficient to mark hers as a queenly intellect donating a good to her native Munster spiritually and temporarily that can be measured by no miserly calculations.

In a different sphere from that of Brigid and Ita lived and worked Ronnat, the pious mother of St. Adamnan. Determining to remain in the world she became instrumental in giving to her country one of the greatest of its saintly citizens. She moulded the infant mind of him who in maturity was to preserve for us in the Life of Columba that human and fascinating picture of his beloved master. But besides that she was the indirect means of effecting a social revolution freighted with far-reaching benefits for her nation. As late as her time the women of the Gael revelling in the young vigour of the race oftentimes cherished the excitement of the battle-field and fought side by side with their men. This was without doubt degrading to the feminine nature even though it was often inspired by heroic sentiments. It was one of these debasing features

of the custom which was responsible for the action of Ronnat which culminated in the elimination of her sex from the field of battle. On one occasion, when travelling with her son, seeing the harrowing results of feminine strife she was stricken with horror and pleaded with her child to emancipate women. Her request met with success for the voice of Adamnan raised in protest won for all time exemption from the duty of carrying arms for the women of Erin.

As if to show the sublimity of this task old literature tells us that before Adamnan could in this respect become the liberator of women he had to prove himself worthy by the cleansing force of great suffering. Furthermore we are informed that Heaven itself took special notice of the problem that was his. In Adamnan's Law in the Book of Raphoe there is recorded a supernatural interference in behalf of the women of the Gael. The story is replete with delicate sentiments towards womanhood and insists upon its supernatural dignity and domestic sacredness. "After fourteen years," it says, "Adamnan obtained this law from God and this is the cause. On Penecost eve a holy angel of the Lord came to him, and again at Pentecost after a year, and seized a staff and struck his side and said to him: Go forth into Ireland and make a law in it that women be not in any manner killed through a slaughter or any other death . . . . Thou shalt establish a law in Ireland and Britain for the sake of the mother

of each one, because a mother has borne each one, and for the sake of Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, through whom all are . . . . The sin is great when anyone slays the mother and sister of Christ's Mother, and her who carries the spindle and who clothes everyone."

Other individuals to whom we would like to devote more space were it available, we must briefly mention. About the domestic life of the mother of Columbkille facts are very silent. But can we not without doing violence to our fancy picture the patriotic nobility of Ethne who moulded the mind of the greatest saintly worker for national honour, tradition and civilisation that Ireland has produced. Indeed, no sanctified member of the church in any age or clime could outdo the child of this mother in affection for his native land. Before Enda founded the noted monastic and scholarly institution of Aran he was a rough tribal leader revelling in wild forays and bloodshed. The sweet and firm influence of his sister, Fanchea, robbed him of his rudeness and converted him into a mystic lover of peaceful ways. Several others there were of this calibre to whom only a special chapter could do justice.

Oftentimes not only individuals but even families possessed striking sanctity and nobility of heart. In the lives of the saints and the martyrologies there are many instances of the collective holiness of a high grade of all the girls in a family. We read in the martyrology of Tallaght

that the daughters of Baith in the plain of the river Liffey were so distinguished for their piety as to be honoured by a special festival on the second of January when a church was dedicated in their honour. Considering the disturbed state of public life the possibility of finding such a domestic serenity is little short of marvellous. It could only occur in a country where the highest respect for the sacrosanct character of the family and the fundamental value of its wholesomeness for the nation at large overshadowed all inter-tribal broils and jealousies. It is noteworthy too, that in most cases this type of family was the product of woman's rather than man's influence. Such splendid replicas of the homestead at Nazareth were bound to be not only luminous centres of religion but beacon-lights calling the nation to safest anchorage within the harbour of domestic sanctity. There it would find the truest antidote for disintegrating forces and the best guarantee of continued loyalty to the dictates of its highest self.

Before parting with the saints we must say a word about that virtue of chastity which was the very core of their moral and mental greatness and the ultimate basis of their usefulness to the nation. We have seen at length how even in pagan days it was honoured and in this chapter we have occasionally seen the glory of its presence amongst the early exponents of christianity. Here we would like to dwell on it more at length but

we must content ourselves with the production of a few facts that shall illustrate the rigid and oftentimes harsh principles governing its maintenance.

St. Patrick, who usually showed himself to be so kind and forgiving, did not think that his people should consider him too severe when he ordered even his sister, who was accused of sin, to be run down near Armagh by his charioteer. "Drive the chariot over her," he bade him, "and the chariot went over her three times." Even if the historicity of this tale be challengeable its preservation in tradition manifests the national scrupulousness where this virtue was in question. Who has not heard of the violent methods of St. Kevin of Glendalough, when he sought to guard himself against the attentions of a fair Irish Cathleen? We have no reason for believing that there was anything gravely immoral in her actions, and yet the story did not hesitate to make the saint plunge her into the depths of a lake as a punishment for her folly.

In customs as well as in the lives of individuals there is evidence of the national delicacy where this virtue was concerned. So conservatively did the saints treasure woman's reputation that not merely monasteries but certain tracts of land were declared unlawful ground for feminine footsteps. Within the watery boundaries of Inniscathy no woman's presence was tolerated. These preventative measures, of course, were taken for the or-

dinary woman and should not be interpreted as indicative of narrowness of mind and undue distrust of and disrespect for women. Where the sanctity of men and women was of such a high grade as to render both parties, humanly speaking, immune from grave sin, no wall of exclusiveness was set up between them. On the contrary communication was encouraged, and some of the greatest men and women saints frequently met and were on terms of intimate friendship with one another. There were to be found, even, monasteries of such a unique type that close association of the sexes was a matter of daily life. This was due to the fact that the inmates of these houses were the first order of saints whose holiness of life reached a high degree of excellence. In these places "women were welcomed and cared for; they were admitted, so to speak, to the sanctuary; it was shared with them, occupied in common. Double or even mixed monasteries, so near to each other as to form but one, brought the two sexes together for mutual edification; men became the instructors for women; women of men." * The Irish were, indeed, severely sound but not irrational in their zeal for the noblest ornament that womanhood could possess.

* A. Thebaud. Op. Cit. p. 104.

CHAPTER VI

Women of Action from the Ninth to the Seventeenth Century

WITH the passing of the eight century the women of Ireland found themselves in the presence of a problem that was entirely new to them. Hitherto all their activity was confined to questions merely affecting their nation from within but now there came the menace of an external force that threatened to destroy all the most treasured possessions of their land. The first grim clouds of invasion swept down from the cold lands of the Northmen over Irish skies glowing with the warmth of christian fervour, and menaced by their malignant pagan lightnings the serenity of the atmosphere created by the mating of the doctrines of Patrick with the civilisation of the Gael. The new situation furnished a striking contrast to that of the golden era of the three preceding centuries and was calculated to test the most sterling fund of heroism that the nation possessed. It was a challenge not merely to the local sense of honour of a clan but to that common feeling of pride that welded the whole congeries of clans into that spiritual commonwealth called Ireland. It was an hour when the

the presence of a strong womanhood could act as a mighty leverage to exalt the soul of the people above all fear of final destruction.

That Irish women did not live up to their past in the face of this new peril we have no ground for assuming. The records of this period are very conservative in the giving of information about men or women but the little they provide when properly interpreted shows that the daughters of Erin fought a creditable fight. Very little beyond obits are mentioned in the annals in the case of individuals in the early and mediaeval centuries and as we know from other sources that some of these who are dismissed thus hastily were people of distinction it seems only reasonable to assert that others for whose fame we have not such corroborative evidence were in all likelihood important personalities. In a word the mere fact of mention in the annals seems the hall-mark of distinction for those whose memory is thus preserved. We hope that the reader will keep this in mind as an aid towards a sympathetic understanding of the position of woman in the centuries that antedate the Tudor era.

In the Annals of the Four Masters, several women of the ninth century are recalled as possessing a prominence equal to that of most of their brothers of distinction if the number of words that commemorate them has any worth as a measure of greatness. But besides these we have a few instances where more lengthy accounts are given

of the activities of women. In the reign of Domnacad, Ard-Ri, a dispute for the sovereignty of Munster arose between Cumeide and Ceallachan. Things were looking stormy and a bloody clash seemed to be impending when the wisdom of a woman in council won the day. Keating tells us that the mother of Ceallachan travelled from Cashel to where the contestants met and besought them "to remember the agreement come between Fiachaidh Muilleachan and Cormac Cas that the descendants of both should alternatively inherit Munseer . . . . And as a result of the woman's discourse Cumeide left the sovereignty of Munster to Ceallachan."* The fact that the person for whom this noble lady pleaded was her son in favour of whom she might have been prejudiced did not tell against her for her argument was founded on justice which the glamour of a throne could not force her opponent to resist.

Into the life of the same Ceallachan there entered the heroism of another woman. This time his enemy was Sitric, a Danish prince, who plotted to effect by treachery the death of the Munster king. Mor, the Irish wife of the foreigner, hearing of the scheme saved the life of the intended victim by a timely warning. She was wedded to her land and kin before all things and she faced the wrath of an angry husband rather than see them injured. Like her Muirgel, in A. D. 882, won fame in dealing with another of the leaders

* Irish Texts Society. Vol. 9. p. 223.

of the Northmen. This latter lady, the daring daughter of royal Maelseachlainn, slew a chieftain of the foreigners that her country might get rid of a powerful and most troublesome foe.

In this same period there is evidence of another kind that demonstrates the loyalty of woman to kith and kin and country. Women were made the special target of the wrath of the foreigners in such a general way as to show that they were regarded as a valuable national asset. True, indeed, libertinism to a large extent inspired this policy of the pagans but their wholesale deportation of women to foreign parts is strongly suggestive of the Cromwellian anti-racial movement that centuries afterwards sent many a cargo of feminine victims to the Barbadoes. Of the Danes it is stated in the Annals of Clonmacnoise that in the year 830 "as many women as they could lay hands on, noble or ignoble, young or old, married or unmarried, whatsoever birth or age they were of, were by them abused most beastily and filthily, and such of them as they liked best, were by them sent over seas into their own country there to be kept by them to use their unlawful luste."* Another ancient writer with a weeping pen tells of the harassed virtue and beauty of those turbulent days. "Many were the blooming, lively women; and the modest, mild, comely maidens . . . . whom they carried off into oppression and bondage over the broad, green sea. Many and

* Dublin. 1896. ed. Rev. D. Murphy SJ.

frequent were the bright and brilliant eyes that were suffused with tears at the separation of .... daughter from mother.'' **

During the next century the goading of the Northmen became more venomous and serious and yet their augumented tortures elicited only a growing resistance from the nation and an increase in number of the women who merited special attention from the chronicler for pronounced value to the commonwealth. For this they continued to suffer from the invader. Their hostile incursions were frequently unannounced and many a time no sex was spared by the ruthless sword of the pirates of the North.

There was one, however, who did not suffer for she was conspicuous rather for malicious greatness than studied patriotism. Yet we must not pass her over for she displayed an ability in intrigue and rank-seeking that was out of the ordinary even though it wore the apparel of evil. Her soaring ambition led her into three provinces where in succession she pledged herself in wedlock to Olaf Cuaran of Dublin, Malachy of Tara and Brian the Great of Kinkora. It was with the last of these monarchs that she manifested the greatness of her vindictiveness. Gormlai, for this was her name, was a fit companion in sheer intellectuality for the able lord of the Dalcassians but her duty as a wife was lost in her overweening pride. Ill-brooking the vision of her family in

* Wars of the Gael and Gall. ed. J. H. Todd. London. 1867. p. 43.

subjection even to her husband she inserted the poison of jealousy in the heart of her brother and made him the defiant enemy of Brian. Impelled still further along her serpentine ways and heedless of plighted troth and her marriage vow she offered her hand in wedlock to Sigurd in return for his aid against the grandson of Malachy whom her wounded pride wished to vanquish. Wider and wider she spread her tentacles of secret scheming until she held within them the forces that paved the way for the Battle of Clontarf. That conflict drove the Dane from Ireland but its benefit was very dubious for on its fatal field fell the most statesmanlike and constructive monarch that the country knew for centuries. From it there resulted disputed successions to the sovereignty of the High King which might have been avoided had Brian lived. He would have bequeathed to his family a leadership that foes might fear to dispute and to his country a sense of national government and organic solidarity which might have expelled the invading legions of the second Henry of England.

As the trouble-haunted years of the eleventh and twelfth centuries wing their feverish flight into the silence of the past the little brightness that is hidden in them is scarcely noticeable. It is a fitful, twinkling light in a wilderness of darkness and chaotic waters. Yet we have no doubt that the tradition of a noble womanhood still endured and helped to keep within the nation that

latent strength which manifested itself in days of resurgence. Such an item as that which records the death of Bevinn in 1134, who was a female erenach of Derry Columbkille, serves to strengthen that conviction. The office which the lady held entailed responsibility for the management of church temporalities. In the case of Derry it must have been especially onerous for this was one of the most important ecclesiastical establishments in the country. Yet in the midst of political distraction sufficient faith in woman still resided amongst the people to entrust to one of her sex the civil administration of Derry's church property. Another significant proof of the prevailing respect of the Ireland of this time for woman's ability came from the pen of Giolla Modhuda O'Cassidy, Abbott of Ardbraccan in County Meath who died about 1143. This man who combined considerable learning with poetic powers wrote a History of Women from the earliest times to his own day. He who had written long historical poems on the monarchs of Ireland believed the wives and mothers of these rulers as worthy of a scholar's attention as the sovereigns themselves. His action must have been inspired by the presence of a capable womanhood in his own time.

Sweeping onward we find the land imperilled by a new invader. This time the stranger gave every sign of intending to make himself a permanent dwelling place within the island to which

he had been introduced. The Anglo-Norman had arrived and four decades had not elapsed ere he began a systematic framing of machinery of government through which to secure his new possessions. Unlike the Dane the Anglo-Norman with stolid deliberations and methodic action settled down almost from the beginning in his acquired territory as if it had been the cradle of his race and was intended by nature to be his for all time. This was something that the Gael had never before encountered and its very novelty was a fresh tax upon his determination to defend his ancient heritage.

Nothing daunted, the daughters of Ireland remained faithful and did their part where the fight was sternest. When they could, they employed all the weapons they had in their armoury of fascinations to make the trans-channel visitor a sympathetic member of their national family and when success was not assured by such strategy they did a lion's share in the work of keeping those beyond the pale of conversion from enjoying the confidence of their people. When for instance the daughter of Hugh O'Connor, King of Connaught, in 1226, was forcibly detained in Dublin by the English, we can feel sure that they were not so attached to her presence on account of her Anglophile tendencies. We have to travel but the space of another decade to find a Mac Maurice manifesting his interest in a similar manner in Irish women. Occupying the chief executive position within the

territory where Saxon writs ran, he thought it a necessary imperialist move to keep many respectable women in bondage where their protection was very questionable and their nationalist efforts were eliminated.

Despite officialdom, however, the sunbeams of Irish life slowly but surely bridged the rampart of darkness that prevented the amalgamation of the races and the "degeneracy" of the "superior" Saxon was certainly becoming an unpleasant reality. To check this mingling of "polluted" Irish waters with the "limped" stream of the invading flood new methods were strictly urgent. The first Edward was an enthusiastic supporter of such tactics and in 1295 statutory bayonets were levelled at the breasts of any who dared to retain or acquire anything that suggested Gaelic civilization. Yet twelve months had scarcely vanished before the royal ears could hear the revolting news that even an Irish maiden had no respect for England's decrees. The deathless song of the Coolin which is supposed to date from 1296 is a monument in music commemorating the defiance hurled at these statutes by a woman. It was a high crime and misdemeanour for an Irishman to wear long locks. To one who fell under this ban the maid in question was about to offer her heart and hand when with doubtful love he consented for her sake to save himself from Saxon vengeance by submitting his locks to the imperialist scissors. Such a selfish surrender to aggression she would

not for a moment entertain and proudly told him she would have him with his flowing hair and its attendant perils, but never with a cropped head and Anglicised security.

The years that ensued saw Edward and his statutes little more than a memory whilst their would-be prey even of the weaker sex still waved the banner of indignant repudiation of things oppressive. English dominion was now rushing towards the precipice which lay between it and destruction and instead of turning back and becoming aggressive was striving frantically to check the speed of its retreat. To add to its weakness there came a king, Edward III, who thought France a more satisfactory field for the glutting of his martial vanity than Ireland and left his subordinates in the sister isle to maintain their hold there with little encouragement from his royal self. In the midst of these happenings Irish women who forced the reticent pen of the chroniclers into eulogy became more and more numerous. In 1316, Dervorgill, the wife of Hugh O'Donnell, procured for herself a force of gallowglasses and she did not maintain them for fancy manoeuvres or to help the Viceroy. We hear of a Darrel O'Donnell in 1343, of whom it was said that "there never was a woman of the tribe who surpassed her in goodness" and we feel sure that her primacy of merit amongst the daughters of Tirconnell was not obtained without very substantial service to her clansmen. Within ten more

years our attention is focussed on another woman of this tribal stock named Gormlai than whom there "was not in her time a woman of greater fame or renown."

Not long after this the English government determined to reapply the methods of Edward I for the purpose of reclaiming the Irish from their "savage" ways. In 1367 the Statute of Kilkenny reaffirmed the policy of proclaiming all manners and customs of the Gael illegal. However there were ladies who seemed to care naught for its sanctions, for twenty years later there is record of a daughter of Hugh O'Neill, "a lady that far surpassed all the ladyes of Clanna Neales, in all good parts requisite in a noble matron." Knowing what the past history of that famous clan was we can easily imagine that this noble dame must have grievously sinned against the decrees that emanated from the Marble City. Away in the west, a scion of the royal house of O'Connor, seemed equally heedless of the crusade preached from Kilkenny. Her name was Cobhlai Mor and by 1395 she had established a national reputation for herself as a hostess and her mode of entertaining was not inspired by any Saxon code of etiquette.

Further and further away ebbed the tide of English civilisation as the fourteenth century fared rapidly towards approaching dissolution. Then suddenly Richard II burst in upon the retreating waters endeavouring by a display, and nothing more, of sheer majesty and power to stem

their progress. Content with this he hastily returned to England only to hear that the waters continued to rise and threatened to engulf beneath them every remnant of foreign dominion.

To this new avalanche the feminine element added impetus and weight. Women continued to appear as good practical housewives who regarded it as their prime duty to preserve that family sobriety and sense of hospitality which should keep the source of Irish energy and anti-Saxon aggressiveness strong and wholesome. There went to her everlasting reward in 1421 a great matron of Connaught, Mor, wife of Walter Burke, the "most distinguished woman in her time in Leath Mogha, for knowledge, hospitality, good sense and piety." In the same province it is recorded there lived in the next generation a certain Celia Burke who was the wife of another of the Gaelicised strangers and "was the most preeminent of the women of Connaught." This preeminence in the west at this time was an impossibility unless it had been based on hostility to England. A contemporary of these Connaught dames was Cathleen, the "old countess of Desmond" who was born in 1464 and continued to live until the reign of James I. Her longevity was most remarkable but her ability to sustain and surmount suffering was equally striking. She traversed faithfully all the valleys of affliction through which her family passed and fought for it with unsubdued spirit. When the first Stuart reached the throne

she, who had known days of abundance, was reduced to utter destitution. But even then within a stooped and aged frame she had a soul of adamant. She never lost hope, and carrying her weak daughter on her back, she made her final journey to the court of James in London where she wrenched justice from the monarch in person. Whilst her ultimate surrender as a suppliant before English sovereignty was regrettable it was somewhat palliated by the extremity of her age and her loyalty to a family that had now become part and parcel of Gaeldom.

With the destruction of feudal aristocratic power through the wars of the Roses there leaped into being the dynasty of the Tudors. The new house was destined to have vigorous and ambitious monarchs who were well able to manipulate the vast strength which was snatched from the prostrate barons. That power was soon directed towards the reconquest of the Irish lands that had been forfeited through domestic strife in England. There was instituted a campaign of aggressiveness against everything Irish that brought untold misery to the people and culminated in the utter undoing of their polity and laws.

To the elimination of the native government, however, the Saxon victory was confined. The soul of the land and that vast heritage of tradition that went to sustain it remained substantially unchanged. And it is our high pleasure to be able

to state that during this period as always, womanhood did its part in sustaining the vital breath within the nation. The increased rigour of the foreign government and the augmented weight of sorrow which it piled upon the Gael did not make the tender soul of its womanhood hesitate to do its duty. On the contrary, the added bitterness of the new calvary only found an ever-growing number of voluntary victims to court its gall and vinegar. Whilst those amongst them who had not come into contact with the foreigners' wild ways did their part as of yore in sustaining by championship of ancient manner and custom that spirit bond of nationhood that no tyrant steel could sunder.

Beginning with the bleak and iron-ribbed principality of the O'Sullivan in the southwest we find towards the close of the fifteenth century its chieftains still deeming their ladies' civic usefulness worthy of considerable remuneration. All the standing rent due to the Lord of Beare from his crag and rock continued to be given to his wife for her idle expenses. A proof of the merit that won this hereditary recompense may be witnessed in the heroism of the daughters of Beare, humble as well as great, after the disasters of a hundred years had brought red ruin to their principality. When after desperate resistance the proud keep of Dunboy fell into the hands of the English the staunchness of the women defenders brought them the stern revenge of the enemy's

sword. "Some ran their swords up to the hilt through the babe and mother who was carrying it on her breast," says a most reliable writer, describing the activities of the foe after the fall of the castle.* The hangman's rope, too, did its deadly work upon several women with Carew superintending operations. Those who escaped the steel and the strangling noose threw in their lot with the brave O'Sullivan in his heroic retreat towards the North. In this the trials were so exacting upon the courage and physique of the sturdy band of men that some of their bravest were lost through lack of staying power. Yet hear what O'Sullivan says of the manner in which their sisters on the march bore themselves. "I am astonished," he says, "that . . . . women of delicate sex, were able to go through their toils, which youths in the flower of age and height of their strength were unable to endure."*

Moving northward into deep-vallied Munster we encounter many a true sister of the women of Beare. In 1524 all Thomond knew of a Mor O'Brien who did her best to keep a buoyant and robust spirit within the warlike and the cultured in "an open house of hospitality." 1548 the wife of O'Dwyer was such an influence within her husband's territory that when it sent a payment of tribute to the White Knight her consent was vital to the transaction. Spenser in Pacata Hibernia

* Ireland under Elizabeth. O'Sullivan Beare. Dub. 1903. p 156.
* Op. Cit. p. 178.

dwells regretfully on the "treacherous" action of the Lady of O'Brien, Lord of Lixnaw, which resulted in the death of a certain Maurice Stack. That there was perhaps some element of good, at least for the Irish, in a deed where the gentle poet saw nothing but rampant foulness does not seem unlikely when we hear that the victim was a "worthy subject (more worthy than whom there was no one of Ireland birth of his quality.)"

Crossing into the broad domains of the lord of Desmond there is abundance of feminine ability and patriotism to greet us. This is especially apparent in the history of the Desmond family itself. As soon as the feudal aristocracy had been crushed in England the nobles in Ireland were marked out for destruction. But in the latter country the great lords had become far more like independent Gaelic princes than vassals of any king and hence their subjugation was not only a crown but a national policy of the Tudors. Desmond was one of the greatest of the "degenerate" nobles and his defeat was a long and tedious business. Before that was accomplished many noble ladies showed as much prowess in the struggle as their lords.

The staunchest and most distinguished of the galaxy of fighting dames was she who was mated in suffering glory with the last Earl of that Munster house. She stood by him unto the last even when the pardon and protection of the British Crown was proffered her and when in the

words of Holinshed "whoever did travel from one end of Munster to the other, would not meet any man, woman or child, saving in towns or cities; and would not see any beast." It was this sterling loyalty to her land and husband that wrung from Malbie the bitter statement that she was "an infamous woman" and "the greatest worker of these wicked rebellions on the Pope's behalf" and hence was beyond the pale of amnesty. When, at last, the Desmond's sun of hope had set forever his Countess braved in futile effort the wrath of Sir Warham of St. Leger to get from him a pardon for her heroic lord. And that fervent loyalty that was hers pervaded the hearts of even the lowliest of her servants. We cannot forget Mary Sheehy, her devoted maid, who faced the perils of the lonely road in those lawless days for her mistress' sake only to find herself at the end of her journey in the prison of the Queen's President of Munster.

Close by Desmond was the chieftaincy of the Mac Carthy of Muskerry. Here we are reminded of the self-sacrificing Eleanor Mac Carthy who at one time in its history saved the leading house of the Kildare Geraldine from extinction. After the abortive revolt of Silken Thomas and Henry VIII had produced the grim exhibition of six Geraldines dangling at the end of a rope on Tyburn Hill only one Fitzgerald of that line escaped the royal clutches. This was Gerald Fitzgerald, the heir to the house of Kildare, who succeeded in eluding the royal endeavour to entrap him through the ef-

forts of the noble Eleanor. Taking him under her protection, for he was then but a boy of twelve, she kept him in Muskerry whilst the arm of a Mac Carthy could shield him. When his haven of safety in Muskerry was menaced she brought her protegee through many perils to the land of O'Donnell in the North. Here she married the chieftain of Tyrconnell for the sole purpose of making the position of the young Geraldine all the more secure. But her spouse was faithless and realising his treacherous designs upon the boy she abandoned him and his unworthy scheming. Knowing now that nowhere on Irish soil could young Gerald find safety she effected his escape to the Eternal City where papal friendship shielded him.

Leaving the Geraldine we transfer our attention to the Ormond family. Here woman appears as a doer of great deeds and a giver of wise counsel. The most illustrious woman in the history of that Earldom was the Countess Margaret. In her the eighth Earl of Desmond found a life companion who shouldered the greater part of his burdens of state and disposed of them in a masterly fashion. Her husband had many enemies and the aid of her vigorous and constructive mind must have been a tower of support for him when he sought in spite of external aggression to maintain a strong and orderly rule at home. That this was at his disposal we know from the authority of Campion, the jesuit, who says that she "was a rare and noble

woman and able for wisdom to rule a realm." To this we can add the tribute of another old writer who says that her husband "bare out his honours and the charge of his government very worthily, through the singular wisdom of his Countess, a lady of such port that all estates in the realms crouched unto her, so politique that nothing was thought substantially debated without her advice." * Her mental astuteness she was able to complement by the weapon of force. She was fashioned in such a rugged mould that in feats of physical prowess she could put the ruler of Ormond to shame and could levy blackmail on her neighbours by an armed band that she maintained for her personal aims.

Yet in the avocations that tell of a finer fibre in her character she was not deficient. Moved by a feeling of nationalism as well as appreciation of the aesthetic she found pleasure in patronising the arts. At her invitation artificers crossed the seas from Flanders to impart to her people the mysteries of the tapestry-making in which they excelled. Her admiration for letters led her to erect a school where those who hungered for the food of the mind got what their souls desired. In brief, the life-task which she accomplished was so remarkable that her memory is still a vivid and prized possession of the inhabitants of Kilkenny City whilst that of her husband is dimmed by the mist-inducing lapse of centuries.

* Romance of Irish Heroines. McCraith. Quot. p, 41.

In the neighbourhood of Ormond there are other instances of feminine worth that merit production. In 1535 there is record of a Janet Eustace who was a persona ingrata in the eyes of Dublin Castle. The Saxon gave her the hospitality of a prison for "being the great causer of the insurrection of Thomas Fitzgerald and of her son James Delahide." Nearly half a century later an official was deeply angered by the sister of Simon MacDavid and his anger was due to loyal official reasons. When he had arrested her his words were: "if she do not stand by me in steede I mean to execute her." A little later the wife of Sir Barnaby Fitzpatrick, Baron of Upper Ossory, was evidently in sympathy with the sentiments of an anti-English husband and for that reason was forced to change with his her residence for the most austere apartments of a Dublin prison, when the Elisabethan kidnappers secured for their mistress in the castle prison of the Metropolis the youthful Hugh Roe O'Donnell the strategy of a woman contributed to his rescue. This was Rosa O'Toole who cooperated with her brother Felim and her husband, Fiach O'Byrne, in the liberation of the young chieftain of Tyrconnell. The work she participated in, cost England many a man and dollar and gave Ireland one of the most efficient and picturesque of its leaders.

How bitterly the minions of England regarded these activities of the womenfolk in this part of Ireland may be estimated by their savage treat-

ment of many of their sex. The sword and strangling rope were used unsparingly to crush this very unbecoming spirit in the souls of Irish ladies. It was regarded as an effective way of procuring the extermination of the race as well as of telling women that their traitorous guilt was equal to that of men. Coote, a true son of the infamous President of Connaught, amused himself at Blackhall, Kildare, according to the author of Cambrensis Eversus, by massacring women and transfixing their infant children on their breasts. He liked to dispatch the child with the mother for it was one of his principles of political philosophy that "a bad crow from a bad egg" was an indubitable law of nature. On one occasion he committed to the rope a noble lady who was his host and taking the unborn babe from her womb strangled it by the hair of the martyred mother. He had an eminent rival in butchery in Cosby, governor of Leix, who resorted to similar methods for the civilisation of the wild Irish.

As we direct our vision from the Southwest to the land of Owen and Connell in the North where the Gael by the shield of his might saved the sanctuary of his ancient heritage until the bitter end from the sacrilegious legions of Elisabeth, we cannot but expect to find some staunch defenders of his strongest fortress amongst the ranks of women. Knowing how thoroughly the government at London set itself to inject an English mind into the great Hugh of

Tyrone and how for a time it seemed to have partially succeeded we cannot but feel that if his wife was influential in his home she must have contributed to the strength of his grim resolve when he challenged to the combat all the forces of England. But we know from the confession of an English official that his wife was Mary O'Neill "the Lady . . . by whom he is most ruled" and are not therefore basing our former conclusions on premises of imaginary origin. Speaking of the O'Neills reminds us of another lady, the wife of Nelan O'Neill, who was one of the official plenipotentiaries engaged to settle the disputes between her husband and the O'Neill. Then there was the lady of the famous Thurlugh Lynagh O'Neill who was a very worthy partner of the stout old chieftain. She stood staunchly by the side of her war-harassed husband where her ability won for her special attention from English officialdom. Malby, from the security of the land he had conquered, issued an ominous warning to his government lest her leadership might make his subject province an unsafe place for Englishmen. His words were that "she had already planted a good foundation, for she in Tyrone, her daughter in Tyrconnell, and Sorley Boy in Clandaboy, do carry all sway in the North and do seek to creep into Connaught." * She was evidently the master mind not only within her own domains but of an alliance that held in its grasp the power of a province.

* O'Grady. Cat. of MSS in British Museum. p. 404.

Close by in gallant Tyrconnell were high-souled dames who bade fair to outdo their sisters of Tyrone in the service of Uladh. Queenly and true loom forth the figures of Ineen Duv, the mother of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, and her daughter, Nuala, who aided in masterly fashion the young eagle of the North to hold for many a year in his mighty talons his native territory against overwhelming odds. Ineen was Scotch by birth, being the daughter of the Lord of the Isles, but was Gaelic by descent from the race of Colla Uais and was certainly loyal to her ancient blood when she heard its call in the land of Connell. Her advice was ever valued by her able son and many a time befriended him in the hour of need. When the dauntless Hugh left the warders of Dublin prison wondering how the elusive chieftain had escaped from their toils and in his native Tyrconnell summoned his people together for a conference on questions vitally affecting their destiny, his mother was one of the dominant counsellors of the assembly. She clarified their deliberations by the logic of her arguments and by pointing out to them the severe and honourable path of duty she added by her display of fortitude to the unyielding attitude of their resolute souls. As the olden writer puts it "it was an advantage that she came to the gathering, for she was the head of advice and counsel of the Cinel-Conail, and though she was slow and very deliberate and much praised for her womanly qualities, she had the heart of a hero and the soul of a

soldier, inasmuch as she exhorted in every way each one that she was acquainted with, and her son especially, to avenge his injuries and wrongs on each one according to his deserts." That she could face the sterness of war as well as the entanglements of the council-chamber we know from the fact that she fought against a son of O'Donnell by a former wife on whom in the interest of her own children she inflicted a defeat. For such emergencies as this she had always ready at hand a mixed force of Irish and Scots. And her daughter, Nuala, had been so apt a student in the school of her mother that all through life she never wavered in her devotion to the cause that was so dear to the heart of Ineen. She fought for it while a ray of hope shone over it, and she went with it into exile in 1607 when that sorrow-laden ship brought the best that Ulster had to the land of the stranger.

Eer we part with the days of Elisabeth, so often called spacious, and certainly so characterised by vastness in the ruin which it measured out to the polity and civilisation of the Gael, we must pay our respects to the greatest Irish lady that ever maintained the honour of her race against the Lady of Windsor. This was Grace O'Malley, "Grainuaile," the glory of Connaught and the most abiding and absorbing subject of song and story in the West since the days of Maeve.

When we think of Grace we primarily associate with her name things dared and done on the sea.

Belonging to a clan which was noted for centuries for its love of the wild waves, Grace, though a woman resolved to maintain this primal attachment of her ancestors. This decision gave to the O'Malley tribe as distinguished a sea leader as its history could unfold. Soon she found herself at the head of a little fleet that for many a year under her captaincy was to rule the wild seas off the western coast with as free a hand as the winds that buffeted them. With her three galleys and two hundred fighting men, the terror of her name entombed more lightnings for unwelcome intruders upon the Connaught coast than did that of her husband, Richard-in-Iron Burke, for "she was as much by sea as by land more than Mrs. Mate with him." Sidney expressed in 1575 his dislike of her when he condemned her to Elisabeth as "a terror to all merchantmen that sailed the Atlantic." Her galleys were, no doubt, an unwelcome vision for Saxon merchantmen out for the destruction of Irish commerce and the development of British imperialism on the seas. Such as thwarted that nefarious work were surely pirates in English eyes, though the orbs that saw in them this malice belonged to the greatest robber mariners of those days. But, then as now, what was virtue in the Saxon was crime in the Gael. However, Grace could boast that no English buccaneer ever forced her to land. Day and night she kept vigil over her fleet, for tradition has it that, even in her hour of rest, in her castle tower

in Clare Island, a cable through a shaft in the wall was always at hand to summon her to her ships.

As the might of Elisabeth had little terror for her in her native West, so it failed to awe her in the very palace of the English Queen. It is said that she once paid a visit to London, where she interviewed her Brittanic Majesty. On this occasion the lure of an English title was held out to her in the hope that she might forget that she was Grace O'Malley and be henceforth the loyal and exalted Countess of somewhere. Grace knew her own dignity and duty, and did not hesitate to inform her would-be benefactor that she would never be the titled servant of another and that the position she enjoyed as Lady Chieftain of the O'Malleys was as royal and orthodox as that which Elisabeth herself could claim.

With Grace O'Malley we part for the present with the heroines of Ireland. They fought a splendid fight and the sun of their lives set in glory with the dying Irish state. If they did not succeed in keeping brehonism in the land and the law of Saxondom away, they kept alive what created brehonism and Irish civilisation, the dauntless belief of the people that they had an immortal national soul that sooner or later would resurrect their departed polity over a land free to mould its future as it willed.

CHAPTER VII

Virtuous and Noble from the Dane to Elizabeth

WHEN last we dealt with those characteristics which are peculiar to noble womanhood we were pondering on centuries of luminous virtue unchallenged by little that was hostile. So numerous were those who then sought moral perfection that they created not merely within their own individual souls but also within the nation an atmosphere of religion that contributed all the advantages of a nursery to every single flowering of virtue. It is true that the common resultant of a highly standardised christianity was the product of individual effort, but this should not lead us to forget that once this atmosphere was created, it had powerful reactionary influences upon each wayfarer along the path of the christian life. The exalted public sense of the beauty of a strictly christian life furnished a strong incentive for individual hunger for virtue, whilst it eliminated many possible factors that might militate against it.

But the centuries that succeeded the golden age of the saints introduced factors that were to withdraw many of the elements that hitherto made noble living relatively easy. The clear skies that

gave the warmth of their sun-lit features to flowering virtue were to be veiled by many a darksome cloud girt round by chilling blasts. Foreign aggression was to throw the shadow of its ugly head above the untroubled horizons of Gaelic christianity, and prove by its unwholsome presence whether the ideals that Patrick brought were merely hot-house plants or robust growths capable of withstanding adverse atmospheric conditions.

That they withstood, if not with consummate success, at least with a degree of victory that was unique, the hostile elements encountered, is a fact in the history of the nation at large that there is no denying. And as women as an integral part of the nation inevitably participated in the triumph of the whole there is no need to prove their continuity of noble living by citing endless numbers. We will only endeavor to unearth the prominent ones with a view to procuring material for a conclusion relative to type and the standard of wholesome living maintained by the whole feminine section of the nation. That that brand of virtue continued to be of a very elevated and unique type we believe to be the case.

In the period we are considering, the evidence in general of the native records bears rare and inappreciable testimony to moral decline in womanhood whilst it provides abundant proof of sterling loyalty to moral principles. Where slurs are cast on the good name of Irish women the sources are usually so prejudiced that they

merit little respect. Besides, the few black sheep of genuine wickedness that are met, there files in far-surpassing numbers the fair ones with clean and snow-white fleeces. Throughout the march of the centuries good and true noble souls greet us like so many stellar glories flashing their hopeful gleams into the hearts of the oppressed and conveying to them the exhortation to be steadfast till the storm-swept skies became fair again.

Starting with the period of Danish incursions we behold a veritable reign of terror launched upon all that was peaceable and good. Churches were plundered, schools destroyed and families slaughtered in cold blood. Society was thrown into a state of violent disorder and the peace that nourished pious and noble life was menaced on every side. Yet despite this chaos women of highly christian and refined calibre are often mentioned in the annals as the product of the ninth century. As disorders thickened in the years that ensued, ladies of this type became more numerous. With rare exceptions those recorded were of noble rank and of a nobility of mind that was an ornament to their positions. One of these, Gormlai, in the tenth century, was a queen in dignity and in heart. Her conjugal fidelity was so impressive that it caused the old writer to give an unusually elabourate account of her. A way of thorns was her progress through life, but her sorrows only served as a foil to set off the tenderness and strength that her soul enshrined. She had to

lose the companionship of the princely and noble Cormac Mac Culinan, when the call to the episcopal dignity joined his royal sceptre of Cashel to the ecclesiastical crozier of that kingdom. Subsequently, her marriage to Carroll of Leinster brought her nothing but woe. Cormac fell in battle by the hand of her second husband. As he lay in death the vilest indignities were offered him by Carroll. Gormai dared to reproach her ruthless husband for his deed, and for her devotion to a noble soul was violently hurled to the ground.

Later on, happiness momentarily seemed to beam on her when Niall of Aileach became her spouse. But its life was short, for the maw of battle claimed him as he fought a patriot's fight against the Danes at Rathfarnham. When the hour of burial came, the sorrow-stricken widow called forth a funeral lament in honour of the dead. And when the sod was over him and she had departed from the grave to face a lonely life, she never lost vision of her faithful husband. Finally this fidelity to his memory cost her life itself. One night as she lay asleep, her haunted fancy summoned the departed to her side; when rushing with a flood of eagerness to embrace him, she suffered a mortal wound from the headpost of the bed. Thus nobly did she close her troubled career, and go in manner most pathetic to link her spirit with that of one to whose memory she paid the tribute of a martyr's homage.

At last a brief lull came in the terrible struggle with external aggression. The raven of battle was hushed for some years by the army of Brian, and the dove of peace remained undisturbed. During this period we behold a feminine self-respect so impressive that a lone lady could traverse the length of Ireland without fear of molestation. It is true that Brian's control over the island contributed to this lady's security, but such remarkable immunity from attack in those days would have been most improbable, had woman not implanted by her previous noble bearing a genuine respect for her sex in the soul of the nation. It showed a universality of respect that was rooted in a universality of merit on the part of women that overwhelms the critic who seeks in the licentious temperament of a chieftain, or the undisciplined mind of a royal maiden material condemnatory of the moral status of the nation's womanhood.

A rather long passage in the Wars of the Gall and the Gael tells this story. Here it would likely have been confined to students of history had not the genius of Moore popularised and immortalised it in his musical lyric, "Rich and Rare." We think its reproduction here is pardonable.

"Rich and rare were the gems she wore
And a bright gold ring on her hand she bore;
But oh! her beauty was far beyond
Her sparkling gems and snow-white wand.

" 'Lady, dost thou not fear to stray,
So lone and so lovely through this bleak way?
Are Erin's sons so good or so cold,
As not to be tempted by woman or gold?'

" Sir Knight! I feel not the least alarm,
No son of Erin will offer me harm:
For though they love women and golden store,
Sir Knight! they love honour and virtue more.!'

On she went and her maiden smile
In safety lighted her round the green isle;
And blest forever is she who relied
On Erin's honour and Erin's pride.

When the years of peace passed away with the great monarch of Kinkora, and endless dynastic strife ensued between the claimants of his throne, the women, praised by the annalists for goodness of heart towards the poor and the church and for love of the penetential, grew more numerous than ever. To distant Rome went the Queen of the Gailenga in 1051 seeking in penance a secure passage to the world beyond. What trials she must have endured to satisfy her pious cravings at the heart of the christian world! A less ambitious journey did Bibinn, daughter of Brian the Great, undertake when in 1073 she carried the pilgrim's staff to Armagh, Patrick's city. Here she sojourned in self-denial till death brought her quiet and peace. Four years later there passed away Gormlai, the wife of Toird, who left behind her a great benefactor's name. She "distributed,"

says the annalist, "much wealth amongst cells and churches and the poor of the Lord for the welfare of her soul." To the favourite monastery of Columbkille, Derry Mor, the daughter of King Murtagh O'Brien, betook herself, where in 1137 she passed away in most edifying manner. There was another king's daughter some decades later, whose conduct was not so calculated to win our admiration as was that of the O'Brien lady. Yet it had not all the malice that many give it for, though Dervorgilla deserted her husband for the King of Leinster, she was induced to do so by the cruelty of her own lord and the encouragement of her brother. And so much did public opinion deem the action of the Leinster King responsible for her fall, and so high was its standard of female morality that its armed forces drove the delinquent monarch from his realm to a Saxon shelter. That her sin was due to weakness rather than malice seems likely, for so keenly did she feel the gravity of her lapse that she endeavored to atone for it for the rest of her life in monastic seclusion. And this was not the only remarkable manifestation of goodness with which history has associated her name. Her gifts to the church were oftentimes very considerable, and on one occasion they eclipsed those of all generous givers before her. In 1158 her donation to the clergy on the occasion of the consecration of Mellifont Abbey was sixty ounces of gold, triple the amount contributed to the premier see of Armagh by Brian

Boru, whose munificence towards the church was one of his prime characteristics.

Dervorgilla reminds us of Roderick O'Connor, the Ard-Ri, who espoused the cause of her injured husband. In the High King's life there is other evidence of the rigid moral rectitude of contemporary women. The provisions he caused to be made for its preservation were so stringent and so efficient, they demonstrate that only high merit on the part of those protected could deserve such serious attention from the nation. He convened a great meeting of prelates and lords at Athboy in Meath in 1167, where laws were passed guaranteeing, as in the days of Brian the immunity of woman from attack throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. How well the nation responded to the demands of the assembly we know from Dr. Lynch, who says they were "so salutary, that a woman might safely travel through all Ireland, which then enjoyed such tranquillity as Northumbria is said by Bede to have had under the royal sway of Edwin."*

It was during the reign of this Ard-Ri that the Anglo-Norman came in the guise of a religious reformer. If his plea had any basis of sincerity he should have seen that there were many in the land far better qualified to reform him than he them. Amongst these, the ladies alone could prove the hypocrisy of the would-be evangelists. They continued to furnish, after English occupation,

* Op. Cit. p. 71-2&

conspicuous examples of virtue that could very favourably bear comparison with that of their sisters across the Irish sea. It is all in vain for apologists of the Saxon intrusion to seek in some anti-Irish comments of St. Bernard a justification of this invasion. If the statements of St. Bernard were true in relation to Ireland, we are justified in assuming that they were also applicable to England. He has said far harsher things of the latter country than he has uttered about Ireland. He has stated, for instance, that immorality was rampant in England, whilst he has spoken only of some cases of concubinage in Ireland. Besides, there is abundance of evidence to substantiate his onslaught on English morals, whilst there is little of real weight to support his anti-Irish utterances.

When we hear of the Bernardine accusations, we must remember the noble women that Irish homes still continued to provide. When the first marauding barons crossed the seas, there lived in the palace of the Munster King his daughter Etain, who some years later was to die in pilgrimage at Derry. Fifty years afterwards the compiler of the Annals of Kilronan paid tribute to the goodness of Failge of the house of Conor Mac Dermott. Her passport to immortality was a comeliness of soul in consonance with that of an attractive appearance, whilst her generosity threw open the portals of her home to all who sought to make happy in a becoming way the fleeing hour. A contemporary of hers was the

wife of the King of Aeleach, who was famed for like characteristics. The Annals of Clonmacnoise relate the religious ardour that, linked with a quickness of intellect and sunniness of disposition, gave Ireland in 1269 the remarkable Christina O'Neachtain. She was, says the annalist, "a right exceeding beautiful woman, well hymned, bountiful in bestowing, chaste of her body, and ingenious and witty delivery of mind, devout in her prayers, and finally she was inferior to none other of her time for any good parts requisite in a noble gentlewoman." In the West she had one who vied with her in uprightness of character. This was Lasareena, the daughter of the famous King Cathal O'Connor of the 'Wine-Red Hand' who was called "the noblest in Ireland in her time."

With women of this type presented to the stranger, whilst for the first hundred years, through lack of intimate acquaintance with Irish life he still cherished dreams of the religious reformation of Ireland, it is little wonder that, when circumstances threw him into closer contact with the native race, all his doubts about the moral greatness of the women of the Gael were dispelled. As the fourteenth century grew beyond the stage of infancy, various causes, which need not be enumerated here conspired to effect the amalgamation of Irish and Anglo-Irish. The settlers were compelled by the force of events to fraternise with the natives, and the knowledge thus acquired dispelled their misapprehensions. Intermarriage of

the two races became frequent, and that one which regarded itself as religiously the superior of the other became the rapid prey of the latter's civilisation. It was surely a marvel to witness this conquest of the foreigners by the life and manners of a people whom, in the highest department of life, they regarded as sorely in need of reformation. The marvel needs no comment, save that it clearly proves that such a fascination could not have emanated from Irish life, had it not been better than that of the race it vanquished.

In the face of these facts it is interesting to know something of some of the leading women who participated, by the dignity of their lives, in this conquest of the heart. One of these we find to be Derbail O'Connor, who in the first half of the fourteenth century was reputed to be "the best woman that ever came of her own tribe." She had during her lifetime a worthy rival in goodness in Duthalach Mac Diamarda, who is known to us as "a choice woman without dispute." The house of Aiffric O'Rahilly lost in 1364 a lady of whom it is handed down that "there was no stint to her goodness up to the time of her decease." The land of Breffney sorrowed in 1367 for the death of Derbail O'Rourke than whom "there was not since Una, daughter of the King of Lochlannn, a woman of greater beneficence."

The year in which the last-named lady went to her reward witnessed a weak and extreme legislative effort to stem the tide of 'degeneracy' that

had been let loose upon the Anglo-Irish by intercourse with such social purity and brightness as has just been revealed in the persons of some of the leading ladies of the country. It failed to realise its end, for the same clear and laughing waters of Gaelic life flowed on unabated as before and continued to woo the thirsty foreigner to their sweetness. And reformers still continued to be reformed.

In 1371 the clan Mac Carthy bewailed the loss of Joan, who had contributed to that victory of Irish honour by a life of charity and lavish hospitality. There came an honourable end to an honourable career when, in 1378 Mor O'Farrell, "an excellent woman with dispute, died a death of Unction and Penance and was buried honourably in Cluain-Conmaicne." She had as contemporaries the wife of O'Rourke, who was "an excellent woman," and Nuala O'Farrell, whose entertaining habits rendered her name so fascinating for those of English blood as to compel the government to give her the hospitality of a prison. The sweet song of Eileen Aroon, which so captivated a genius like Handel, was inspired by the 'Treasonable' nobility of Eileen Kavanaugh, a woman of this period. The Countess of Desmond of this time was no friend of England, for the sunshine of her palace-life was provokingly Celtic.

Then came Richard II, hoping by the magnificience of his majesty and the terror of his arms to eclipse that Celtic glamour that so hypnotised

his Saxon subjects. His very transient glory was of little avail, for when it departed with him the power of the olden spell seemed to reassert itself upon the colonists with redoubled vigour. The avalanche of Irish life increased in velocity and bulk, as it bore menacingly nearer and nearer the rapidly waning strength of the fortress of the stranger in Dublin; and the feminine elements in that avalanche assumed a speed and massiveness that entitled them to a substantial part in its growing ability for destruction.

In 1419 the annalist takes note of Finmehain Ua Manchain for the purity that dwelt in her soul, and the honesty that was hers was well worth recording. Finmehain could visit Thomond and feel pride in meeting Mor, daughter of the king who ruled there, for plenty of womanly sense and virtue was her store. She was "best of her name in gerorosity, sense and piety that was in Ireland in her time." She could pay a visit to the land of Breffney also, and take delight in the company of Gormlai O'Rourke, whose beauty of soul and body was the glory of her sect. She could include in her itinerary the residence of Una O'Rourke, for there the most hospitable and religious atmosphere of any home in lower Connaught would greet her. Above all, she could not afford to neglect the princely home of Margaret O'Connor of Offaly which, owing to the matron who directed its life, had earned the esteem of all Ireland as a centre of beneficence. In another place we hope to

dwell more at length on the munificence of Margaret, especially towards the learned. Here we will content ourselves with a few words on the spirit of fidelity towards the christian religion that actuated her. High churchmen were her most trusted councillors and most honoured guests. Her wealth and time were liberally devoted to the erection of churches and their becoming adornment. For the orphan and the homeless she had nothing but the tenderest love and solicitude.

The next generation which linked that of which the great Offaly lady was the finest product with the time of greatest debility in the history of Dublin Castle, emulated the religious and civic worth of the womanhood that has just preceded it. In its ranks we find in 1444 Duthalai Mac Cahill, who cheered many a poverty-stricken soul by her generosity. Twenty-two years later the quaint language of the annalist informs us that death dealt a serious blow to Erin by depriving it of Grace Maguire for "a great tale in Ireland was the death of this good woman." Two other ladies of the same name and time, Margaret and Ailbe, were well known for their exemplary christianity. The latter ended by transferring herself and her property to the monastery of Lisgabail. These daughters of Fermanagh had a worthy neighbour in Aiffric O'Neill of Tirowen, "a superior woman without defect." Close by in Tirconnell they had another rival in virtuous and civic activity in Finola O'Brien, the wife of Hugh

Roe O'Donnell. "As regarded both body and soul, she had gained more fame and renown than any of her contemporaries." An act for which she can never be forgotten was the building of the famous monastery of Donegal. She was as much responsible for the execution of this work as was her distinguished husband.

Irish monks had not long been chanting their psalms in this sacred edifice of the Northwest ere a critical era in the history of their native land had manifested itself. The first of the Tudors came to the throne of England, and with his arrival the tide that threatened to engulf the last vestiges of English power in Ireland was finally halted. Little by little a variety of circumstances forced it to retreat until the government of Dublin was once again on a secure and aggressive position. The victory that had been all but completed had gradually to be relinquished until the decease of Elisabeth witnessed the decisive overthrow of the tribal state.

Yet, nothing daunted the womanhood of Ireland, who continued to maintain the same unyielding attitude that had characterised it heretofore in the face of adversity. It held tenaciously to the bitter end its old ideals of elevated living, though the much relaxed grasp of another style of living had reasserted itself with an ever-growing strength and deadliness.

In the ranks of this never-ceasing procession of daughters of the Gael pledged to God and

country there comes Margaret O'Flanagan, at the close of the fifteenth century, who cooperated with her husband to "build a chapel in honour of God and Mary in Achadh-Mor." Marching into the new century that was so momentous in the history of Ireland we discover in Grace Maguire of Fermanagh one whom an age of innovations found staunchly adhering to the tradition of piety, philanthropy and humanity that was so prized by many a spirited dame in the history of her house. The stripling century could lay claim to Margaret O'Rourke, whose skill, ranging from the womanly science of home-keeping to the sublime ambition of the church-builder, was the common knowledge of all the race of the Gael. She was "the unique woman who, of what were in Ireland of her time, was of best fame and hospitality and house-keeping . . . . was buried in a magnificent and richly endowed church "built by herself for the Friars Manor close by Dromahair." It could also boast before its youth had vanished of the Lady of Hugh O'Neill, whose matronly ways and social respectability were admirably based on a singular fidelity to the precepts of her Maker. And ere yet this stage of its life had vanished it could furnish "the Dark Damsel, wife of O'Donnell, whose mated virtue and wit few could afford to dispute."

Then came a challenge from across the waters to Irish loyalty not only to fatherland, but also to faith. Religious scruples that were mat-

rimonially very convenient severely afflicted Henry VIII and finally resulted in his severence from the church of Rome. Not content with reformation of creed in himself, he sought to extend his change of conscience to Ireland as well. With what hostility the nation received his suggestion is well known. It beheld in it a more pernicious menace to its life and civilisation than had hitherto been essayed, and treated it as such. It saw in the new assault a deadly thrust at a faith which had become an integral part of its ancient mode of life, and had entered into its every part purifying, strengthening and glorifying it. It is in this new concept of the novel features of this Saxon campaign that the real key to the secret of Irish resistance must be sought, for the nation sustained its faith not merely for its christian, but for its Gaelic value and its civilisation not solely for its temporal but for its eternal preciousness.

In the teeth of this new gale of imperial vindictiveness, the heroic hardihood evinced by the women who aided the nation to survive the storm becomes more and more interesting. While Henry was preoccupied with the business of transforming himself into a Saxon pope Judith O'Donnell, the wife of the cultured Manus, continued as of old to display in a prominent way her devotion to the precepts that emanated from the 'old-fashioned' papacy of Rome and the generous traditions of her fathers. When with more radical projects in view Elisabeth intensified the policy of her father

she found one who little heeded her schemes for the religious and social 'betterment' of the Irish people. This was Grace O'Malley, the mariner Queen of the West. Sturdy of soul and unyielding as the billows that harassed her native shores, she was like them pure at heart. The Lady of Windsor might ravage monasteries, confiscate ecclesiastical property and destroy the shrines of the saints, but Grace would prove her religious conservatism by a contructive policy in the spheres where Elisabeth's was destructive. A monastery on Clare Island still bears testimony to the fact that Grace loved to bestow her wealth on the temples and shrines that Elisabeth despised. And that the race which produced so many church-builders might continue to preserve its wonderful vigour and vitality, she gave all the weight of her encouragement to the practice of early marriages and the rearing of healthy children who would be a bulwark against the enemies of faith and father-land.

In later years, while the Elisabethan fury raged at its worst there was one in Breffny, Gormlai O'Rourke, who maintained the ideals of munificence towards the church which character-ised Grace. Her festive board, too, served to keep some of the old love of the ancient life and some of the warmth of hope in the hearts of her clans-men. A little later lived Mor O'Brien, who was "a woman praiseworthy in the ways of woman," when the ravagers of Ireland did so much to strip

Irish femininity of its self-respect. Aye, even towards the close of the Elisabethan era of 'frightfulness,' Joan Maguire, the pride of Fermanagh, was herself a living proof that the conquest effected by the sword and famine left the Gaelic soul of Irish womanhood unvanquished. When famine stalked throughout the land claiming thousands of victims and leaving some places tenanted only by wolves, and when many a daughter of the Gael was left fatherless and brotherless, she did what she could for the widow, the orphan and the penury-stricken and outlawed clergy. In the words of the analist she "was the pillar of support and maintenance of the indigent and the mighty, of the poets and exiled, of widows and orphans, of the clergy and men of science, of the poor and the needy."

Before parting with the noble women whose lives contributed such staying power to the nation in its attachment to Gaelic traditions in this most critical of centuries in Irish history, we intend to give some further general evidence to substantiate what has been revealed in the careers of the women who have been recorded.

We will begin with the testimony of Captain Cuellar, a Spaniard, who has provided us with some impressions he received from a journey through Ireland. There is reason for believing that this gentleman was in no way prejudiced in favour of the Irish, for in his account he did not hesitate to record some incidents that were not

creditable to Ireland. Happily, there is every reason for believing that these were isolated and abnormal, and in no way indicated anything like a universality of prevalence. Neither did he leave behind him any statement condemnatory in a general way of the people amongst whom he fared. But a statement has survived in favour of Irish women. He pays a tribute to their fine instinct for the management of the home, saying that, as a body, they were "great workers and housekeepers after their fashion."* In this pithy assertion there is much more than might appear at first sight. Where a hard-working womanhood obtains there is little opportunity for anything save moral strength and civic integrity. When the home is the central sphere of that labour, it incontestably proves the existence of an upright and useful womanhood.

Confirming and developing Cuellar's statement comes the testimony of Dr. Lynch. He informs us of his belief in the splendid loyalty of Irish women to their marriage vows and a modesty of bearing which characterised their domestic activity. With regard to matrimonial life he states: "nothing can induce me to believe that promiscuous lusts were indulged and that the marriage tie was disregarded by the Irish . . . . . when I reflect that this same people, when yet pagans, paid such respect to their women, that they would not allow them to intermarry with the Picts, with-

* Adventures. ed. Allingham. p. 62.

out the express stipulation that the maternal line should be preferred to the paternal in the royal succession."** This connubial purity and loyalty seemed to be indicated in the sense of decorum and studied simplicity manifested in their external appearance. "They did not polish their cheeks with rouge nor borrow fair complexions from ceruse. If they were handsome they studied more to be inviolably faithful to their husbands than to heighten their beauty by ornament; if they were not handsome they did not aggravate the defect by deformity of soul."***

But perhaps the most indestructible argument he provides us for their moral integrity was their affection for their children. Where the maternal instinct is pure and strong a loose conception of marriage obligations is a very rare abnormality. That this was preeminently realised in Irish mothers has been asserted by Lynch. "There is no quarter of the world," he says, "where the infant is attended with more affectionate solicitude than in Ireland at the present day." And the energy, valour and strength of the manhood of that time was in itself no feeble revelation of the veracity of the author of Cambrensis Eversus.

In the light of all this favourable evidence it is interesting to consider for a moment the accusation of excessive love of drink that many English writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

* Op. Cit. p. 353-4.
* Dr. Lynch, Op. Cit. p. 223.

level at Irish womanhood. In the first place, if the Saxon assertions were perfectly true, it is certain that that standard of morality which from other sources we know to have been the property of Irish women could not possibly have existed. Secondly, slanderous language about Irish character was no unusual thing in those days, and by no means helps the veracity of these English writers who speak of Irish feminine affection for strong liquor. Thirdly, their accusations are in no way substantiated by any of the native records. Perhaps their 'high conception' of Irish civilisation unduly affected their teeming imaginations and led them to assume the existence of more pronounced bibulous tendencies in Ireland than in England, where they could contemplate those pothouses half-full of tippling women whom their own literature portrayed.

With this we must bring this chapter to a close. We do so feeling confident that the matter contained therein demonstrates that the strength of purity and the sunshine of geniality which made their home in the soul of Irish womanhood from the Danish to the Elisabethan troubles played no inconsiderable part in the work of keeping the spirit of Ireland elevated, self-reliant and unsubdued when the grandeur of its civilisation had been humbled to the dust.

CHAPTER VIII

Devotion to Letters from the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century

THERE are many who contend that a life devoted to high intellectual emprises extracts all that is most womanly and best from woman. Whatever amount of truth may be contained in this theory there is no doubt that the radical exclusion of woman from the sphere of literature can mean for a nation the loss of a substantial influence that might be highly conducive to its moral and mental betterment. Whether woman be the intellectual inferior of man or not she is from the numerical standpoint as important a fraction of the nation as man, and the amount of mental power residing in her as a part of the national entity must always be very considerable. Besides, her donation to the printed page is calculated to embody in a more marked degree certain educational qualities which are of rather rare occurence in the products of the masculine literateur.

With this in mind we cannot help feeling regret that so many centuries of the world's history passed away with woman as a negligible quantity in literature. In Ireland, however, we do not dis-

cover such a notable absence of woman from things literary. Though in this country, as in every other, women writers were very rare until the centuries that history calls modern, interest in letters and learned men attained a degree of intensity and continuity that can scarcely be paralleled elsewhere.

This Irish feminine delight in letters manifested itself in the desire of mediaeval women to acquire several languages. It could be seen in the fact that even in the earliest stages of the history of christian Ireland, women of the world as well as those who had assumed the garb of religion had the ambition to transmit their thoughts in both prosaic and poetic form to the guardianship of the manuscript. Above all, it was apparent in the history of that long line of noble ladies whose patronage and encouragement sheltered and stimulated within the precincts of their homes the 'literati' of their land.

Earlier in this book we had occasion to speak of woman's literary activity within the cloister during the golden age of Irish christianity. We can go back to the same period and find her sister in secular life essaying similar work. In the sixth century the mother of King Branduff had a writing style which was evidently utilised on wax tablets. We are not compelled to deduce from meagre fact the common ability of her sisters of the Gael to manipulate the pen. It is distinctly stated in the old record that ladies were ordinarily

able to accomplish such a feat. Before we leave the era of the saints, we find the daughter of the King of Culann betaking herself to the great school of Clonard to learn to read the psalms in Latin. Thus she displayed a desire not only to have a direct knowledge of the scriptures, but to acquire a working grasp of one of the learned languages of antiquity. It shows also that young ladies had the same privilege as boys seeking culture at the learned institutions of the time. Very likely it was due to such training that the lady nurse of Cuicamne was able to utter in bardic fashion over him whose impromptu verses which paid tribute to the learning which was his whilst he lived.

Later on, while the Danish storm was raging, some poems exhaling a delicate intermingling of joy and sorrow are supposed to have come from the pen of Gormlai. In her, Ireland can probably claim to have given birth to the earliest historical woman writer, and one too who, as the world's feminine literary pioneer, was the author of a considerable amount of verse, for according to the Annals of Clonmacnoise she "composed many pitiful and learned ditties." Her "Lament for Niall" was her best production, being characterised by originality and sincerity and a passion that knows a striking restraint in its greatest fervour. Its poignancy was aggravated by the fact that it arose from hearing the joyful sounds of a wedding which, kindling within her a remin-

iscent mood, sent her back in fancy to happy days, the glory of which when contrasted with her present state of bereavement led to a splendid sorrow.

With this knowledge of woman's association with literature in the early centuries of the christian era we can, with high expectation of finding that relationship continued, transfer our attention to the middle ages. And we are not to suffer disappointment, for we find women so vigorous in the prosecution of their literary avocations that the English government regarded them as worthy of its persecuting attention. A Presentment of the Grand Jury at Cork in the fourteenth century mentioned in an unfavourable light as "poets, chroniclers and rhymers" the names of Mary O'Donoughue and Mary Clancy. Another who might merit similar notice of the enemy of Irish learning was Fionnuala Mac Finghinn, who was known about the middle of this century as "the woman who was best that was in Ireland in her own sphere as the wife of a learned man." There yet remains one lady, Aine Mac Keon, who deserves recognition as one of the distinguished women of this century. She can not have escaped the fascination of letters, for she was married to Matthew O'Eogain, who, according to the Annals of Ulster was "fourteen years continuously in Oxford delivering lectures." If then as the wife of this cultured man she was the "chief entertainer and tribe-head of her ilk," it is no farfetched con-

clusion that her services were usually at the disposal of those who experienced the hypnotism of their ancient lore.

Following the highway of learning into the next century we continue to find amid the bardic companies that trod thereon ladies who joined in the procession to encourage or participate in its work. Fiounnuala O'Kelly, well-known for her piety, thought she was doing work of a supernatural quality when her patronage went out to the 'literati'. She was "a woman that was a general protection to the learned companies of Ireland." The next generation produced a lady, Maragaret O'Connor of Offaly, in whose personality the spirit of mediaeval literary patronage reached its apogee. The munificent attitude she displayed in this matter is sufficient to enthrone her as one of the most illustrious personages in all the history of the principality of Offaly. The receptions she provided for the learned ones had a vastness and splendour that was truly regal. Her invitation was not circumscribed even by the four seas of her native land, for her noble hand proferred hospitality to the children of the Gael in exile, as well as at home. The numbers that responded to her call were immense, but no one left her princely residence unsatisfied.

We can not part with this noble woman without giving that enthusiastic description of one of her great receptions, which Mac Firbis has handed

down to us. We are told that twice in the year 1434 whilst a dreadful famine searched the vitals of the land did generous Margaret open her home to the learned of Ireland and those who dwelt in Scotland. With Mac Firbis as narrator, let us listen for a moment to his tale of the splendid pageantry of intellectualism that distinguished one of these occasions. "All persons, Irish and Scottish, or rather Albans" were welcomed by Margaret, "as it is recorded in a Roll to that effect, and the account was made thus, that the chief kins of each family of the learned Irish was by Gilla-na-Naemh Mac Egan's hand, the chief judge to O'Connor, written in the Roll, and his adherents and kinsmen, so that the aforesaid number of 2700 was listed in the Roll with the arts of dan or poetry, music and antiquity . . . . . And Margaret on the garrets of the great church of Da Sinchell clad in cloth of gold, her dearest friends about her, her clergy and judges too, Calvage himself on horseback by the church's outward side, to the end that all things might be done orderly and each one served successively . . . . . As it was we never saw nor heard neither the like of that day nor comparable to its glory and solace. . . . . And so we have been informed that the second day in Rathangan (on the feast of the Assumption in harvest) was nothing inferior to the first day. And she was the only woman that had made most of preparing . . . . . all manner of

things possible to serve God and her soul, and not that only, but while the world stands her very many gifts to the Irish and Scottish nations shall never be numbered. God's blessing, the blessing of all saints and every other blessing from Jerusalem to Inis Gluair be on her going to Heaven, and blessed be he that will hear and read this for blessing her soul."* Well, indeed, did the lady responsible for such a scene merit the eulogy of Thomas D'Arcy Magee when he says:

"She made the bardic spirit strong to face the evil days.
To the princes of a feudal age she taught the might of love,
And her name, though woman's shall be scrolled their warrior names above."

A few others in this century who befriended the 'literati' we should like to place in this book in the company of Margaret of Offaly. There died in 1447 Sarah O'Mulchonry, who so tenderly loved the bards that she was called a "nurse to all the learned." In the following generation lived Slaine, the wife of Mac William Burke of Clanrickard, whose bounty towards 'sons of learning' was almost as ambitious as Margaret's. She "was general protector of the (bardic) bands of Ireland and Scotland and a woman who was of best charity and humanity that was in her time." And before the century had vanished into the past it could lay claim to Margaret O'Rahilly, a scholar

* Mrs. Green. Op. Cit. Quot. pp. 346-7.

of considerable ability, for she was "learned in Latin and in English and in Irish."

Coming to the age of the Tudors, which witnessed so much intellectual brilliancy in England, and yet so much Saxon antagonism towards the development of any such cultural magnificence in Ireland, we find the women of the Gael still helping, as far as in them lay, those who had consecrated themselves to the high emprises of the poet, chronicler and raconteur. In the first part of this age the lady of Hugh O'Neill was as noted for her affection for 'folk of learning' as for her ardent piety. Whilst this lady entertained in the North, the wife of Rory Mac Dermott in the West performed a kindred labour of love towards the devotees of literature. In her home at Lough Key she cooperated enthusiastically with her husband to make cheerful the lot of those men of letters who were the target of the persecuting Saxon. The tradition of generosity she upheld was sustained in the ensuing generation within the province where Lough Key was situated, by Sheela Mac William Burke. No man of letters, whatever his tribe might be, came unwelcomed to her homestead, for it was "the resort of bards from the Liffey side, of the Dalcassions' choice poets, of the schoolmen from near Barnasmore, of the tale-reciters and of minstrels out of every airt in Ireland."* A contemporary of hers was the

* O'Grady. Cat. of MSS in British Museum. 404.

wife of Brian Mac Manus, whose all-embracing hospitality was as powerfully focussed upon the literary man as the pilgrim and the penury-stricken wanderer. As the annalist states it, she was "truly hospitable to the poor of God and to the (bardic) bands and retinues, and to pilgrims and to permanent beggars, to erudite and to ollaves, to every one of those that were wont to be seeking largess throughout Ireland."* In 1583 died Margaret O'Donnell, who won the praise of the poet, Teigue Dall, for the protection she bestowed on men of learning. And even as late as the year 1600, when the polity that had encouraged and endowed the learned orders had gone down in defeat, there was a Jean Maguire of Fermanagh, who was "the pillar of support and maintenance . . . . of the poets and of men of science."

Noble, indeed, was the part which the women of Ireland played in the preservation of the learned tradition of the land. No national adversities divorced them from fidelity to that cause, and though despite their efforts the "bardic bands" followed almost in their entirety the funeral train of the civilisation of the brehons to its seventeenth century grave, they helped to preserve through centuries of bardic effort the abiding impress of the old tradition upon the national soul, an impress that no slayers of bard or brehon

* Annals of Ulster. ed. Hennessy. Dub. 1580.

could eradicate. That spirit had to languish for many years to come behind prison bars, but it knew no fear of death, and only awaited the day when the slightest liberalism of the oppressor should enable it to reassert itself with resurrected glory in a literature the progress of which shall never be interrupted until full freedom greets it in the land of its production.

CHAPTER IX

Heroines From Elizabeth to the Present Day

WHEN at the dawn of the seventeenth century we parted with the last of those heroic women whose activities were associated with the last agony of the Gaelic system of government, we saw in the glory of their vanishing forms the assurance that a something essential to nationhood yet abided, and could not, like the organism of a governmental system, be reduced by gun and sword to inanimate helplessness. We are now about to consider how the women who came after them received the deathless ideals that had been transmitted to them by the ladies who held them aloft over the ruin accomplished by the Tudors, and fought for that soul-heritage until our present time.

The reigns of James I and Charles I passed away leaving little of particular interest in feminine activity to be recorded. During this period the patriotic energy of women had, for the most part, to be confined to the inner recesses of their hearts. For its outward display there was but meagre opportunity left, for the aggressive forces of their land were temporarily shattered. With the rest of the nation, they found them-

selves utterly helpless in the hands of the spoliators, who came to complete by wholesale confiscation of the landed patrimony of the tribes the work of infamy that Elizabeth had perpetrated. With a wave of ejection from the stronghold of their fathers sweeping over the country, the only sphere left them for heroism was within the domain of the mind, which they might still hold intact, despite the hell of ruthlessness that was raging round them. They could still preserve the determination never to be evicted from the world of Gaelic ideals, though deprived of their ancestral halls and lands. That this was the case their heroic activity in an approaching age was to manifest.

The era that was to show their fidelity arrived when the parliament of England threw down the gage of battle to Charles I. The worthless king permitted the nation he had persecuted to arm itself on his behalf when, taking advantage of the civil war in England, it might with far more utility for itself, have endeavoured to get rid of both cavalier and roundhead. However, it was nationally sincere in the policy it adopted, for, when Charles was losing in England it hoped to appropriate him as the ruler of an independent anti-Cromwellian Ireland. Besides, he was of Celtic stock, and was not regarded as an intruder into the family life of the Gael, provided he severed all connections with the sovereignty of the Saxon.

A crucial test of Irish loyalty to its own ideals whilst advocating the cause of the Stuart, was the treatment meted out to the nation when the Ironsides of the Protector of England won the day against royalty. That is a fact well known to readers of history. Here we intend to show how conspicuously the womanhood of Ireland shared the punishment for staunchness to its Celtic past.

We will open the bitter, yet glorious, tale with a recital of some instances of the blood-lust of the Puritans and the indiscriminate venting of its fury upon women as well as men. When heroic Drogheda capitulated after a wonderful resistance, the number of women who share with the men the tender 'mercy' of the Puritan sword easily exceeded the thousand mark. In the vault of one church, where a large number of women had taken refuge, not a single lady escaped a cruel death. When Coote plundered and destroyed the town of Clontarf he, as admitted by Lord Clarendon, massacred the women and "three suckling infants." In the same week the ladies of the village of Bullock, fearful of sharing the fate of their sisters of Clontarf, betook themselves in boats to sea. Thither Colonel Clifford pursued them where, being "overtaken, they were all thrown overboard." Who does not know of how the heartless soldiery butchered three hundred women as they knelt round the cross in the market place of Wexford town? Worse than any we have

recounted, perhaps, was the massacre of Island Magee, where the naked steel and the jagged precipice were the weapons used by the Cromwellian ruffians to dispatch helpless women. After multitudes of them had been done to death in their beds, the remnant was driven at the bayonet point over the Gobbins cliffs, where the lacerating rocks and the icy waves completed the work of the murdering steel. The vision of surging woe and infamy that the tale of that night's crime produced in the fancy of Ethna Carbery has resulted in as fierce a song of vengeance as Ireland's poetic anthology contains. We make no apology for giving it in its entirety.

"I am Brian Boy Magee —
My father was Eoghan Ban —
I was awakened from happy dreams
By the shouts of my startled clan;
And I saw through the leaping glare
That marked where our homestead stood,
My mother swing by her hair —
And my brothers lie in their blood.

In the creepy cold of the night
The pitiless wolves came down —
Scotch troops from the Castle grim
Guarding Knockfergus town;
And they hacked and lashed and hewed,
With musket and rope and sword,
Till my murdered kin lay thick,
In pools, by the Slaughter Ford.

I fought by my father's side,
And when we were fighting sore
We saw a line of their steel
With our shrieking women before;
The red-coats drove them on
To the verge of the Gobbins gray,
Hurried them, God, the sight!
As the sea foamed up for its prey.

Oh! tall were the Gobbin cliffs,
And sharp were the rocks, my woe!
And tender the limbs that met
Such terrible death below;
Mother and babe and maid
They clutched at the empty air,
With eyeballs widened in fright,
That hour of despair.

(Sleep soft in your heaving bed,
O little fair love of my heart!
The bitter oath I have sworn
Shall be of my life a part;
And for every piteous prayer
You prayed on your way to die,
May I hear an enemy plead,
While I laugh and deny.)

In the dawn that was gold and red,
Ay, red as the blood-choked stream,
I crept to the perilous brink —
Great Christ! was the night a dream?
In all the island of gloom
I only had life that day —
Death covered the green hill-sides,
And tossed in the Bay.

I have vowed by the pride of my sires —
By my mother's wandering ghost —
By my kinsfolk's shattered bones
Hurled on the cruel coast —
By the sweet, dead face of my love,
And the wound in her gentle breast
To follow that murderous band,
A sleuth hound who knows no rest.

I shall go to Phelim O'Neill
With my sorrowful tale and crave
A blue-bright blade of Spain,
In the ranks of his soldiers brave,
And God grant me strength to wield
That shining avenger well —
When the Gael shall sweep his foe
Through the yawning gates of Hell.

I am Brian Boy Magee!
And my creed is a creed of hate;
Love, Peace, I have cast aside —
But Vengeance, Vengeance, I wait!
Till I pay back the fourfold debt
For the horrors I witnessed there,
When my brothers moaned in their blood,
And my mother swung by her hair."

These bewildering orgies of blood were surely not inspired by the mere royalist creed of their victims. Cromwell did not wade to power through any such welter of blood in England. He did so in Ireland because the daughters of the Gael were not merely advocates of the Stuart cause, but true champions of the national gospel.

But methods even worse than these were resorted to, that a noble womanhood might taste of the most diabolic suffering that a perverted human ingenuity could devise for it. They were torn in thousands from the bosom of their native land and sent into exile to become the prey of the swinish desires of their Saxon masters. Englishmen, with their astute commercial instinct, saw a new field for enterprise in the ranks of Irish womanhood, and discussed the question of its manipulation with their government in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. A systematic 'rounding-up' of Irish ladies resembling the slave hunts of the African wilds became a favorite pastime of efficient traders, that their sugar plantations in the West Indies might have a bountiful supply of physical and moral slaves. Those alone could consider themselves immune from the hunters' toils whose loyalty to England had been proved to be unimpeachable. Should those who were caught in the venatorial net decide, after capture, on the Anglicising of their minds, they had a fair chance of escaping the most degrading outrages, for such a perversion was a most savoury dish for the Saxon imperial appetite. This is clearly demonstrated in the correspondence of some of those responsible for the success of the slave mart. They did not object to helping to preserve Irish feminine goodness, provided it merited such liberal treatment by a previous display of affection for England. Stimulated by this

pious motive, it has been estimated that Cromwell sent twenty thousand Irish, of whom a large percentage were women, into the Virginian colonies and the West Indies.

Another proof, if proof were needed, of the sterling Gaelic spirit and heroism of the women of those days, may be seen in the marriage laws enacted by the Cromwellian legislators. Men marrying transplantable, in other words, truly Irish ladies, ipso facto exposed themselves to the peril of a similar fate. Soldiers of the Commonwealth were forbidden to marry Irish ladies unless they became Protestant, which at least in those days meant English, lest the Puritan brand of christianity and patriotism might fade away before the conquering influence of Gaelic fidelity to God and country.

So much for the evidence of the Irishwoman's hardihood of soul in the treatment which she received from those who looked with keen disrelish on the type of fortitude she prized. We can not part with Cromwellian days without citing one shining example of woman's heroism. This was Rose O'Doherty, the wife of the great Owen Roe O'Neill. It was her entreaties that were largely responsible for the transference of his Spanish blade from the Continent to Ireland. It was thus considerably due to her patriotic heart that Ireland wooed back from the military glamour of Europe one of the ablest soldiers that her history can claim. Were it not for most

unlooked for circumstances, the man whom Rose persuaded to come to Ireland would in all probability have accomplished the emancipation of his people. She is assuredly deserving of a dignified position in the pantheon of Irish memory. For this reason we like to believe that patriotic gratitude enshrined her name in the music of Ireland, where the knowledge of its honour should make doubly dear the haunting melody of Roisin Dubh.

With Rose we leave the blood and iron rule of the dour Puritan behind us, and after watching the sway of Charles II pass away, we find England again thrown into the confusion of a civil war. William of Orange was invited to dethrone the Catholic James, and soon, with the aid of Protestant England, he compelled the last of the Stuart kings to fly to Ireland for safety. The Gael again, with much more sentimentality and generosity than the instinct of national self-preservation should have permitted, took to his bosom the good-for-nothing royal fugitive because of his racial stock and faith. In the struggle that ensued between Ireland and the Orange leader, the resurrected chance of smiting the Saxon appealed to Irish women. Many instances of their heroism might be recounted, but the valour they displayed at one great moment of that struggle throws sufficient light on the tenacious and long-suffering patriotism of Irish femininity. That deed of heroic calibre the walls of Limerick witnessed. Every other fortified city had succumbed to the

Williamite attacks, when the Irish troops determined to make their last great fight at the city on the Shannon. The struggle here was one of the most bitter of the whole war. But no ferocity could quell the fortitude of its inhabitants, women as well as men. And when the ranks of the defending manhood grew thinner as the siege progressed, and the stout walls were reeling to ruin before the Williamite assaults, the heroic women of that city rallied many a time their hard-pressed men and side by side with them, smote with any weapon at hand the onrushing troops of the Orange leader. If, finally Limerick yielded to the attacker, no one can say it was for lack of battling spirit in its feminine population.

Though the heroines of this southern city gazed on the battered and stormed defense works that had been their pride, and the star of their leader, Sarsfield, had set behind Irish skies, the work they had done gave a new fascination to that appeal of the Poor Old Woman to her future daughters to abide in truth and fidelity. How clamorous and persistent that appeal was to be in the immediate future, and how generously responsive to its voice womanhood was to prove itself, the eighteenth century can tell.

The fall of Limerick rang the death knell of the Stuart cause in Ireland, but its sanguine and imaginative adherents continued to dream and sing for many a day of the return of a Jacobite king, for whom a resurrected land might once more fly

to arms. In these reveries and songs there was entombed an imagery that could have risen only from the soul of a nation where women's heroic instinct still lived on unimpaired, and its arresting nature had seized the popular worshipping tendency with all its pristine vigour. When the people spoke in verse of their national destiny, they saw in the pitiful plight of their land all the appealing characteristics of a lady of ideal beauty in distress, and the urgent duty of the chivalry of the nation's manhood coming to her rescue. The bards say visions of Erin robed in the delicate and alluring mysticism of a symbolic Granuaile, Kathleen ni Houlihan or Dark Rosaleen, and made the thoughts that arose therefrom a controlling feature of eighteenth century poetry.

This wave of idealism bearing woman on its crest swept onwards through this century until, in its latest years, the trend of political developments gave many a noble lady an opportunity of verifying by stern activity the recitude of the people that had made her sex a glorified symbol of the national being. The organization of the society of United Irishmen paved the way for the heroic role that the daughters of Ireland played during the eventful years of the last nineties.

In speaking of the women of that period, we can begin with no nobler individual than Sarah Curran, whose devotion to Robert Emmet and the cause for which he stood, has immortalised her name, and made her one of the leading types

of Irish feminine fidelity to the call of a nation and its manhood. A romance of exquisite beauty might be constructed from the story of Miss Curran's relations with Robert Emmet, but, however tempting the subject may be, we are compelled for lack of space to deal with it briefly in this book. The intensity and steadfastness of her life-long devotion to the man who loved his country before all things, has scarcely been surpassed in history. It has been worthily commemorated in Moore's immortal musical eulogy, "She is Far from the Land." This most plaintive of melodies with its armoury of soul-searching weapons tells how the allegiance to her patriot lover never waned, and no distraction could dull the sense of loss experienced, when the law of the Saxon deprived her of him. In foreign climes, like a Siren voice, the music of his memory sang her to death, the death of a woman who died of the passion of a patriot for a patriot lover. Listen to Moore as he tells the sweet, sad story:

"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers around her are sighing;
But coldly she turns from their gaze and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying.

He had lived for his love, for his country he died,
They were all that to life had entwined him;
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,
Nor long will his love stay behind him."

That which has been stated in prose and verse of the unflinching loyalty of Miss Curran to Emmet is unwarrantable, many people contend. They believe they find justification for the maintenance of this attitude towards Miss Curran in the fact that she got married after Emmet's death. It is our opinion that, if the circumstances surrounding that marriage are honestly considered, they completely exonerate Sarah Curran from the charge of infidelity to the memory of the Irish patriot. Her family and friends persistently urged her, if for no other reason, for the sake of her health, to wed someone who would take a husband's care of her. It was only after many entreaties that she yielded to their wishes, and when she did so, she seemed to manifest a lack of interest in her action that could only be accounted for by the all-absorbing devotion of her soul to the one she had lost. Besides, the marriage did not accomplish what her friends desired, for, despite every attention on the part of her husband, she died soon afterwards in a foreign clime.

Linked in honour with the fate of Emmet, was the life of his servant, Anne Devlin, socially humble, but kin in a spirit of the grandees of the soul. She inherited the daring, ingenuity and energy of her uncle, Michal Dwyer, the famous Wicklow outlaw, who for so long a time defied and outwitted the hunters of the English crown. She actively participated in the preparations for the '98 insurrection, helping to forge the engines of

war. And, when at last her master was caught in the meshes of the law, no torture could enduce her to surrender any secret which could facilitate the conviction of her beloved chief. What sufferings she vanquished to establish her loyalty to Dark Rosaleen are told us in that most striking tribute which Dr. Madden has paid to her memory. "The extraordinary sufferings endured, and the courage and fidelity displayed by this young woman, have few parallels, even in the history of those times which tried people's souls, and called forth the best, occasionally, as well as the basest of human feelings. She was tortured, frightfully maltreated, her person goaded and pricked with bayonets, hung up by the neck, and was only spared to be exposed to temptations, to be subjected to new and worse horrors, than any she had undergone, to suffer solitary confinement, to be daily tormented with threats of further privations, till her health broke down and her mind was shattered, and after years of suffering in the same prison . . . . she was turned adrift on the world without a house to return to, or friends or relations to help or succour her."* Did nothing survive but this solitary passage of Dr. Madden it should suffice to make the name of Anne Devlin one to be treasured by a people fashioned in a mould of chivalry.

Before dismissing the name of Emmet, we can not afford to forget the wife of Thomas Addis

* United Irishmen. p. 335.

Emmett, the brother of Robert. Gently nurtured and unaccustomed to the commonplace trials of life, she was fated to encounter circumstances of such a forbidding character as might be calculated to overcome even one trained in the school of adversity. But they could not cow the spirit of Jane Emmett. She beheld her happy home in Stephen's Green invaded by a brutal soldiery, and the menacing steel pointed at the innocent children in their cots, whilst no domestic privacy was respected and her husband was removed to Newgate prison. Thither she pursued him and, eluding the vigilence of the guards she, who had "never waked but to a joyful morning" endured with him the austerites of a cell but twelve feet square. Discovered, she was ordered to leave, but her "mind was made up," and her womanly steadfastness forced the prison authorities to submit to her presence.

Later on, Thomas Addis was removed to Fort George in Scotland and here, too, the heroism of his wife brought him her company to cheer his cell. There she continued to administer to her patriot husband all the consolation of a faithful wife, until they tasted freedom on American soil. In the land of the free she enjoyed the honours that her sufferings merited. Having survived her husband nineteen years she, in the words of Dr. Madden, "terminated in a foreign land a long career, chequered by many trials, over which a virtuous woman's self-sacrificing devotion, the

courage and constancy of a faithful wife, the force of a mother's love eventually prevailed."

Thinking of the Emmets inevitably directs one's attention to Theobald Wolfe Tone, and that one most intimately associated with him, his wife. The part Mrs. Tone had in the making of the patriotic career of her husband in its initial stages forcibly reminds one of Rose O'Doherty and her responsibility for the services rendered by Owen Roe to Ireland. As Rose persuaded the great leader of the seventeenth century to draw his sword for his native land, so Mrs. Tone transferred the attention of her husband from farming in the United States to sowing the seeds of insurrection in Ireland. He had purchased an estate for himself at Princeton, New Jersey, that there he might have that liberty which Ireland could not provide, and the bliss of unperturbed family life. But, Mrs. Tone preferred the high and arduous way along which the patriot must fare, and with a sacrificial spirit denied herself the haven of peaceful home life for the comradeship of one ever threatened by the law that seeks to stifle in martyr blood the deathless voice of a nation. Through her, indeed, America lost a distinguished citizen, but Ireland obtained one worthy of her most select niche in the temple of her great ones, and an inspiration for her principle-loving sons for all time.

Once Tone had embarked on the enterprise that was to lead him through terrible seas to the haven

of death, she never for a moment forsook him. How intimately she entered into his life during that period of grievous anxiety and how greatly he prized her sympathy and aid, we learn from the words of Tone himself. His great confidence in her ability, as well as her will to sustain him and his cause, should be most convincing, since it emanates from a mind such as his. Inferior women may sometimes be the mates of great men, but when distinguished husbands, after the intimate study of their wives that married life affords them attribute to their partners considerable credit for their own success, the objects of their praise invariably deserve it.

Such, we believe, to have been verified in the case of Mrs. Tone, for her masterly husband never ceases to eulogise her. There is nothing more beautiful in the world of domestic literature than the compliments which Tone paid his wife in the epistolary exchanges between them. Obsessed with the feeling of her grandeur of character he proclaims her "the light of my eyes and the pulse of my heart." He told her that she was as indispensable to his life and its strength as the nurturing rays of the sun are to the oak of the forest, before the day of storm. In his Autobiography he said that in his work he always relied on her assistance and received it. "Women in general," he said, "I am sorry to say are mercenary, and, especially, if they have children, they are ready to make all sacrifices to their establishment. But

my dearest love had bolder and juster views. On every occasion of my life I consulted her; we had no secrets one from the other, and I unvaryingly found her think and act with energy and courage . . . . If ever I succeed in life and arrive at anything like station and eminence, I shall consider it due to her counsels and example.''*

Confirming Tone's appreciation of her are those of Lucien Bonaparte and Dr. Madden. The brother of Napoleon when addressing the French Directory on her behalf compared her to ''those women of Sparta, who on the return of their countrymen from battle, when, with anxious looks, they ran over the ranks, and missed among them their sons, their husbands and their brothers, exclaimed: ''He died for his country; he died for the republic!'' We cannot refrain from giving the bouquet of praise with which Dr. Madden has adorned her memory. ''She was a faithful, noble-minded, true-hearted and generous woman,'' he states, ''utterly divested of selfishness, ready to make any sacrifices, and endure any suffering for her husband, her children and her country. Always cheerful, trustful and hopeful in her husband's destiny, and strongly impressed with the goodness of his heart, and the brilliancy of his talents, and his devotedness to his cause, she was the solace of his life, the never-failing comfort of it, the courageous partner and partaker of his trials in adversity, and the support of his weari-

* Autobiography. p. 66.

ness of mind in all his struggles, labours and embarassments."**

In the noble company to which Mrs. Tone belonged we must also include Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, the sister of Lord Edward. Akin to her brother in many aspects of temperament, she was like him, too, in the fervour of her devotion to the Dear Dark Head. She loved the cause he advocated, and she loved him especially because of his loyalty to that cause. Two quotations from her letters are sufficient to convey to the reader the spirit that was her's. They are shot through and through with pride of race, admiration of the patriotic passion of her brother, a courage that quailed before no foe of her land, and an immovable confidence in the ability of her nation to march with dignity to freedom. "Irishmen," she exclaims, ... "it is Edward Fitzgerald's sister who addresses you: It is a woman, but that woman is his sister: she would therefore die for you as he did. I don't mean to remind you of what he did for you . . . . He was a Paddy and no more; he desired no other title than this. He never deserted you — will you desert yourselves? . . . . Will you forget the title which it is still in your power to ennoble? . . . . Will you make it the scoff of your triumphant enemies, while 'tis in your power to raise it beyond all other glory to immortality? Yes, this is the moment, the precious moment which must either stamp with

* Op. Cit. vol. III. p. 252.

infamy the name of Irishmen and denote you forever wretched . . . . or raise the Paddies to the consequence which they deserve, and which England shall no longer with-hold, to happiness, freedom, glory." Again she tells in trumpet tones of the perfect mingling of the waters of Edward's love and her's, as they rushed ever onward to their ocean receptacle, Ireland. In her "he met a soul, twin to his own" because each breathed and loved alike their object, Ireland; Ireland, where each had first drawn breath — Ireland, greater in her misfortunes, in her wrongs than the most favoured country of the earth . . . . Ireland, whom neither falsehood could entice nor interest bribe to apostacy, suffering through successive ages from the oppression of a nation inferior to Herself in all but in one of the adventitious circumstances of fortune."

Just as heroic as Lady Lucy was Mary Anne, the sister of Henry Joy McCracken. In fact, if we wanted to be skeptical of any evidence of courage short of positive acts, we should be inclined to make her far superior in fortitude to the sister of the Geraldine. When the cause which was dear to the heart of Henry met with failure in Antrim, she was with him to keep him strong in an atmosphere of defeat, and when the last grim circumstances attending his exit from mortal life became a reality, she failed not to be with him until the very end. We will let herself tell in her unostentatious way how her magnificent

sisterly love poured honey into the vinegar and gall of poor Henry's final progress towards his calvary. "About five p. m., he was ordered to the place of execution, the old market-house, the ground of which had been given to the town by his great, great grandfather. I took his arm, and we walked together to the place of execution, where I was told it was the general's orders that I should leave him, which I peremptorily refused. Harry begged I would go. Clasping my hands around him (I did not weep till then) I said I could bear anything but leaving him. Three times he kissed me, and entreated I would go; and looking around to recognise some friend to put me in charge of, he beckoned to a Mr. Boyd, and said, 'He will take charge of you.' Mr. Boyd stepped forward; and fearing my further refusal would disturb the last moments of my dearest brother, I suffered myself to be led away." These simple words of Mary Anne, and the act to which they testified, establish her beyond all doubt a queen in the realm of heroism. It is no wonder that Madden should say of her that her name "has become associated in the North with that of her beloved brother. The recollection of every act of his seems to have been stored up in her mind, as if she felt the charge of his reputation had been committed to her especial care. In that attachment there are traits to be noticed indicative not only of singleness of hearts and benevolence of disposition, but of a noble spirit of heroism, strikingly displayed in the

performance of perilous duties, of services rendered at the hazard of life, at great pecuniary sacrifice, not only to that dear brother, but at a later period to his faithful friend, the unfortunate Thomas Russell."

The nobility of soul that was Miss McCracken's was typical of that of many another sister, wife and mother of these trying times. With these, we are compelled to deal more briefly, because a certain needless repetition would be involved in the lengthy recital of their activities, for the roads of heroic endeavor they traversed were very like in nature to that trodden by the sister of McCracken. There was Julia Sheares, the sister of John and Henry, whose unremitting solicitude for her brother's welfare was lauded in the last letter of one of them to her. There was the sister of Myles Byrnes, who, when the savagery of the soldiery drove the people of Wexford to the mountains, was the most prominent of a large number of women who braved the perils of the hills to keep their kin informed of the movements of the troops. Of the wife of Samuel Neilson, Mrs. Concannon has said that no woman of '98 "has suffered so much," yet, when she came to the end of her sorrowful life she deserved this epitaph on her tomb: "a woman who was an ornament to her sex; who fulfilled in the most exemplary manner, the duties of a daughter, wife and mother." What Irishman cannot feel proud of the patriotic fervour of the mother of the

Teelings? She prided in her noble ancestry, and the gallant actions of some of them that were so creditable to their rank. She knew all the elegance and happiness of a cultured home, and yet she did not hesitate to offer on the altar of patriotism the two sons, who were the very light of her life. Who that loves liberty, and feels the thrill of that enchantment that comes from the shackled beauty of a national spirit that would feign, with unfettered pinions, wing its way in an atmosphere of its own creation, can think without admiration of Mrs. Michael O'Dwyer, who left ignoble security for the perils of that defiant freedom on the mountains of Wicklow, with her noted outlaw husband? Here she stood by him when the bloodhounds of England were hot on his trail, and when at last he was taken and sent into exile she bore with him the sorrows of his prison ship, and gave him, during the few years of life that remained to him on foreign soil, the solace of a brave woman's care. Two other women, not as well known as those whom we have already placed to the credit of the eighteenth century, but girt round with as deathless a valour as any of them, were Rose Hope and Betsey Gray. Rose, who was the wife of James Hope, was a valuable aid to her husband whenever his patriotic work demanded the services of a courageous and resourceful supporter. Before the rebellion in the North, she did good work by helping to get arms and ammunition to the United Irishmen, whilst apparently plying the

innocent business of a marketer. She did the same in the old city on the Liffey, though her efforts were attended by some hairbreath escapes. Many of her other adventures, telling of the dauntless soul that lived in this daughter of Erin, might be recounted. To the North, too, belonged Betsey Gray, for she came from the vicinity of Bangor. She, not content with being a purveyor of ammunition, sought the more satisfactory work of helping to use it on the Saxon. When the men of Down came out to do battle in '98, she found a place in their ranks. But poor Betsey, with her brother and sweetheart, were overpowered by a party of yeomen before they could do much for their country. She received, however, the death she longed for, and her spirit must feel joyful if it knows that her honourable end has kept her memory green in the popular fancy of the neighborhood. The local folk love to picture her clad in green, and, mounted on her charger as, with glistening blade, she smote the foe of her land. With Betsy we say farewell to the heroines of the eighteenth century, and the threads of golden story they have woven into the fabric of their country's history.

In the wake of the death blow that was given to the dream of '98 came the destruction of Irish legislative independence. Thus English statesmen intended to consign to a grave that harboured no ray of hope that sanguine idealism in which Irish strivings of centuries for national emancipation

had been rooted. They were destined, as usual, to be disillusioned. Ireland, ever fruitful of leadership, did not grow sterile now. She soon produced O'Connell, who plumbed the depths of national self-consciousness, and reawakened the dormant appetite for freedom. That energy which the Emancipator stirred and loosed was destined to know but little rest, until it brought those ideals of liberty from which it sprang so close to realisation as they are to-day.

Pursuing that role which women played in this resurgent activity for liberty, we find nothing that can justify production in this book, until about the middle of the nineteenth century. By this, we do not mean to imply that they slumbered during the years between the Union and this period without feeling the throb of the reinvigorated national impulse. This they certainly did, for the great women of the second generation of this century would have been an impossibility, had not their mothers, who linked them with the days of '98 been admirers of the heroism furnished by the ladies of that time. However, until the spirit of Young Ireland manifested itself, the patriotic activity of women was almost completely unostentatious, and the great work it accomplished was within the quiet purlieus of the home.

With Catholic Emancipation a reality, and Repeal of the Union almost an accomplished fact, the nation, sniffing so much of the air of liberty became restless, until it could enjoy it without

check or limit. The Young Ireland Movement, having for its object no mere legislative freedom but the absolute right of the Irish people to regulate every department of their life as they thought best, gripped the country. Into this movement, the women of the country leaped with an eagerness and courage which would do justice to the patriotic instinct of the daughters of Ireland, in the most thrilling days of the past.

Amongst these Young Ireland women of action there were two who deserve space for individual attention, 'Eva' and 'Speranza' of the 'Nation.' What 'Eva' preached in the newspapers of Young Ireland, fearlessness and patriotic passion, she clearly manifested in her own actions. Who that has heard of it can forget that memorable scene when, in a moment of supreme trial, she surrendered him who was dearest to her, that Dark Rosaleen, whose claims on his affection she regarded as immeasureably more sacred than hers, might suffer no injury. As her sweetheart, Kevin O'Doherty, stood on the dock charged with the high crime of fealty to his mystic lover, 'Eva' was close beside him to confirm his loyalty to that passion. She told him before a crowded courthouse, to proclaim his patriotism like a man, and take whatever penalty such a noble confession entailed. Kevin did so, and for ten long years in prison the silver sound of her heroic words, "be thou faithful, I'll wait," kept chiming a message of hope in his heart, until the day of his liberation.

He was not disappointed by 'Eva' for she had waited, and gave him the reward of her wedded affection for the love that had wedded his soul to Ireland.

In the sisterhood pledged to patriotic endeavor, 'Eva' had a worthy comrade in 'Speranza.' Crowned with beauty, youth and intellectuality, she was a brilliant luminary in the social firmament of Dublin, but no empty glamour of the drawing-room could divorce her from the great service to which she was pledged.

From her pen a message of courage and truth challenging every knavish foe of her land ever leaped forth. With truth as with a sword of light she bade her countrymen

> "Go war against evil and sin,
> 'Gainst the falsehood and meanness and seeming
> That stifle the true life within.
> Your bonds are the bonds of the soul,
> Strike them off and you spring to the goal."

What her pen espoused she never feared to support in her own person. The most remarkable occasion on which she showed that she could practice what she preached was at the trial of Gavan Duffy. We will let A. M. Sullivan describe her action in his enthusiastic and dramatic way. "When the struggle was over, and Gavan Duffy was on trial for high treason among the articles read against him was one from the suppressed number of the Nation, entitled "Jacta Alea Est."

It was without example as a revolutionary appeal. Exquisitely beautiful as a piece of writing it glowed with fiery incentive. It was in fact a prose poem, a wild war song, in which Ireland was called upon that day in the face of earth and Heaven to invoke the ultima ratio of oppressed nations. The Attorney-General read the article amidst breathless silence. At its close there was a murmur of emotion in the densely-crowded court, when suddenly a cry from the ladies' gallery startled everyone. "I am the culprit if crime it be," was spoken in a woman's voice. It was the voice of queenly 'Speranza.'" The woman that uttered those words was certainly one who would not be a failure even if she had to grapple with more stern fact.

The armed efforts of the Young Irelanders proved abortive but the national atmosphere remained charged with the lightnings of rebellion until it assumed a most menacing aspect a few years later. The Fenians believed in the use of the same weapons as Young Ireland. They were ready like their mythical ancestors of old to court almost certain death in battle against the armed might of England. Amongst them there were to be found members of the gentle sex who were as brave as the bravest of their manhood. Typically such was Ellen O'Leary, the sister of the lion-hearted John, who took almost as intimate and fearless a part in the Fenian conspiracy as her dauntless brother. In this work she was as clever

as she was energetic. One of the deeds that prove her ingenuity was the efficient part she took in the rescue of Stephens from prison. She is indeed worthy of being forever associated in the memory of her countrymen with the name of her patriot brother.

The Fenians' plans for an uprising were nipped in the bud by the arrest of many of the leaders and as a result the armed effort that was made to attack the forces of the Crown was absolutely futile. Their complete failure brought the country back to parliamentary methods of seeking redress for its grievances until it chanced upon the able leadership of Charles Stuart Parnell. When in the nineties "the Chief" as the people liked to call him had levelled the heaviest artillery of statesmanship he could devise at the fortress of Saxon domination some of the best purveyors of ammunition that he had were to be found amongst the women of his day. Chief of these were his sisters Fanny and Anne.

Anyone who has read what Fanny Parnell's pen produced cannot fail to see what intense sympathy there was in her heart for the agonising heart of Ireland. Pondering on that calvary of her nation, she contributed most substantially to that avalanche of patriotic emotion that was bearing down upon those who had violated the rights of a sovereign people. John Boyle O'Reilly speaking of the manner in which she championed through her Land League Songs the rights of an

ancient race says that the sweeping messages of her songful utterances were "crushed out like the sweet life of a bruised flower." They were "the very cry of a race." In this relentless crusade of pen and ink she invaded even America where through the medium of the Boston Pilot she won the sympathy of many a heart for her long-suffering land. The ringing command of her "Hold the Harvest" entered a Saxon court of justice where a judge had it read at a state trial to show what a menace it voiced for English power. One glorious verse of it we give.

> "Oh! by the God who made us all —
> The seignior and the serf —
> Rise up! and swear this day to hold
> Your own green Irish turf;
> Rise up! and plant your feet as men
> Where now you crawl as slaves,
> And make your harvest fields your camps,
> Or make of them your grave."

It is little wonder that Davitt called it "the Marseillaise" of the Irish peasant, the trumpet call of the League to the Celtic people to remember the hideous crimes of an odious system, and with trust in God's eternal justice to rise and give battle to the death against the imported curse of their country and their homes." *

As an organiser she displayed as much capacity for patriotic work as in the printed page. It was she who initiated the movement for the creation

* The Fall of Feudalism. p. 292.

of a Ladies' Land League. Despite the frowns of many skeptics and ultra-conservatives who should be friendly she made a success of this enterprise. She made of this society an engine of war that forced Buckshot Forster, one of the worst enemies of the oppressed tenant-farmers, to retreat to his native England.

With Fanny went hand in hand her fighting sister Anne. The latter owned a warrior fire that could not be extinguished and a strength of will that might have adorned the personality of the most masculine of men. She fought "with all her brother's intense application to any one thing at a time, and with more than even his resoluteness of purpose in many enterprises that might enlist her interest and advocacy, together with a thorough revolutionary spirit. * * To have out-Parnelled Parnell in this the ruling feature of his character was an achievement of which the greatest of women might be pardonably proud.

Unfortunate circumstances deprived Ireland of Parnell ere he could win a striking victory for her. Political strife became the thing of the hour till John Redmond was permitted without opposition to take the dead "Chief's" place. Under the new leadership many good concessions were made to the national demands. In the meantime, however, a new idea was gradually taking hold of the country. That idea was Sinn Fein, a system of political philosophy which maintained that the

* Davitt. Op. Cit. p. 300.

time was ripe for Irishmen to discard the Parliament of Westminster and win national freedom by a self-reliant development of Ireland itself. Young Ireland with startling rapidity became enamoured of the new policy and in the Battle of Dublin in 1916 proved its willingness to die for an Irish Republic which the principle of "Ireland for the Irish" demanded.

This brings us to the latest phase of Irish feminine heroism. The most commonplace knowledge of the fight of Easter Week must convince even the most inimical that Irish women are yet true to the spirit of their sisters of the dead centuries. Everything that a man could do must be placed to the credit of heroic daughters of Ireland during that greatest week that Dublin ever knew. Their services to their brothers in arms embraced every department of war work from the manipulation of a rifle to the merciful labours of Red Cross nurses. No better picture of their activity has yet been presented than that given by an English Red Cross nurse whose testimony has every right to be regarded as impartial. "On Easter Sunday" she says, "which was the day first appointed for the Volunteers' manoeuvres, and for which all the men were mobilised the women in the movement were also mobilised and ordered to bring rations for a certain period. It was only at the last moment and for sufficiently dramatic reasons that the mobilisation of the men and women was cancelled. These Irish women

who did their work with a cool and reckless courage unsurpassed by any man, were in the firing line from the first to the last day of the rebellion. There were women of all ranks from titled ladies to shop assistants, and they worked on terms of easy equality, caring nothing, apparently, but for the success of the movement. Many of the women were snipers, and both in the Post Office and in the Imperial Hotel, the present writer, who was a Red Cross nurse, saw women on guard with rifles relieving worn out volunteers. Cumann na mbam girls did practically all the despatch carrying; some of them were killed. . . . . They did Red Cross work — I saw them going out under the deadliest fire to bring in wounded volunteers. They cooked, catered and brought in supplies; they took food to men under fire at barricades; they visited every volunteer's home to tell his people of his progress. I never imagined that such an organisation of determined fighting women could exist in the British Isles. These women could throw hand grenades, they understood the use of bombs; in fact they seemed to understand as much of the business of warfare as their men." *

Such heroism would be a worthy theme for a special volume. Here, however, we cannot afford to be individualistic in our treatment of these ladies, with the exception of a few. Those we propose to favour thus are the Countess Markievicz and the mother of the two Pearses.

* The New York Sun. May 22nd.

The Countess being the only woman in charge of a fighting unit and her name having won international recognition we think that she is entitled to individual treatment here. To gain a proper idea of the debt of honour that her country owes her we must call to mind what barriers she had to burst through in earlier days before she won her way to an understanding of the rights of Irish nationhood. She was born within a circle which the clear light of Dark Rosaleen's countenance could never penetrate. But the honesty of her heart was too powerful for these instruments of darkness and it emancipated her from their control to such an extent as to make her one of the most ardent supporters of Irish Republican liberty.

When the blood-test of this revived republicanism was in operation in 1916 she was in the midst of the ordeal with her brave Fianna or Irish Boy Scouts. These she had founded years before and had fashioned them into a splendidly organised body of young martial spirits who treasured a career of arms as the boy Cuchulainn loved it of old. Leading these throughout the fray she evinced a marked sense of leadership coupled with a courage that nothing could daunt. We can not refrain here from giving the magnificent tribute bestowed on her by Sidney Gifford when her fight had been fought and lost. The consequent fortitude and nobility to which he bears testimony exceeded those of the hour of battle for now the

wild storm of strife had ceased, her fight-fervour had abated and she was face to face with the calm reality of death. We will let Gifford tell how she faced this new situation. "She was sentenced to death by court-martial but the sentence was altered to imprsionment for life. It is reported that she made a vigorous protest when the change of sentence was announced. She had fought side by side with the fifteen men who were shot. She would have shared in their glory if they had been successful. She longed to share their fate, to die rather than suffer the living death of imprisonment for life. To Countess Markievicz, proud-spirited, fiery, accustomed all her days to untrammelled freedom, the very embodiment of both mental and physical energy, imprisonment for life is a far more bitter fate than death itself." * It is little wonder that such heroism drew George Russell from his cooperative farming schemes and the mysteries of the spheres to sing the glories of the Countess and the women of the land she represented.

"Here's to the women of our blood
Stood by them in the fiery hour,
Rapt lest some weakness in their mood
Rob manhood of a single power —
You, brave as such a hope forlorn,
Who smiled through crack of shot and shell,
Though the world look on you with scorn,
Here's to you, Constance, in your cell."

* The glories of Ireland. ed. Maurice Joyce. Quotation. pp. 359-60.

With the Countess we wish to associate in honourable mention the mother of the two Pearses, Patrick and William. She took no positive part in the rebellion but she gave to it all that her heart held dearest, her two magnificent sons. She gave to God and Ireland two of the most beautiful characters that her land had ever known and she gave them with the unwavering faith that she was only doing her duty. That such was her sublime creed we know from the words she uttered at her last sad interview with her son, Willie, after Padraic had gone the martyr's way. Her motherly heart, because it was so motherly and good, was weighted with a most bitter natural sorrow, yet turning to her son she said: "Thank God they are taking you. When I heard they had taken Pat I hoped you, too, would go because I would rather that the two go than leave one behind to bear the sorrow. I am more content to bear the sorrow to the end of my life when I know that as you were always together in childhood, in boyhood and manhood, you are united together in death." Then turning to the English officer present she said: "You have taken my darling son Padraic and now you are about to take my second and only remaining son Willie. Gladly do I offer them to die for Jesus and for Ireland." Well, indeed, did she prove herself to be that ideal patriot mother on whose lips Padraic put the sacred and sacrificial words:

"I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed;
But I will speak their names to my own heart
In the long nights;
The little names that were familiar once
Round my dead hearth.
Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And though I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow — And yet I have my joy:
My sons were faithful and they fought."

With the mother of the Pearses we say farewell to the women of action whose deeds have adorned the story of Ireland. We see in her, one of the latest heroic products of the land, a guarantee of the indestructibility of Irish nationhood. Whilst a nation possesses such mothers as she it is endowed with a nationalising alchemy that can never cease to make soldiers of men who shall not hesitate to seek honour on the death-haunted battle-field whilst the Gael has life and consciousness.

CHAPTER X

Womanly Morality and Honour from the Sixteenth Century Onwards

WE HAVE seen what a record of noble living in the domestic sense of the words had been the property of Irish women until the destruction of that polity at the close of the sixteenth century, which had protected piety and had encouraged so many of those virtues which are the prime ornament of family life. We have likewise observed the steadfastness with which since the collapse of that commonwealth Gaelic feminity had aided in preserving the national soul of Ireland. We think it will be interesting to consider, in this chapter, how faithfully the women of Ireland adhered to the tradition of exalted living handed down to them until the sixteenth century, for in the quietude that hovers round the hearth they were more fundamentally potent in shaping the destiny of the nation than in the council chamber, or in the theatre of heroic deeds.

As the family is, so to a large extent the nation must be, in patriotism and general self-respect. That the Irish home must have been a nursery of morality and civic virtue in the seventeenth

century, we know from the fact of the large families it reared, and the piety that was the ornament of its women. To these two features of Irish life several writers of that age bear testimony, but here we content ourselves with giving that of two foreigners who were eyewitnesses of what they relate. These were Massari and Malasana, the companions of the Nuncio, Rinnucini, who assert that the women of Ireland, despite the disturbed state of the country, bestowed their tender care on large families, and did themselves "with comeliness combine matchless modesty and piety, by which their native attractions were enhanced."*

Not only in prose but in poetry we hear laudatory words bestowed on the women of this century. The sorrowful and suffering remnant of the bardic class made the moral loftiness and beautiful home life of many a lady the theme of songful outpourings. To give but one noted example, the well-known harpist, O'Carolan, paid tribute in several immortal airs to the nobility of the women of his day. And well he might, for the truest friend he had was Madame Mac Dermot, who so loved the tuneful songs of the blind minstrel, that she gave him every help at her command, and wept bitter tears when the silence of the grave enfolded him.

In addition to this evidence of womanly worth there is some also of an indirect nature which,

* The Irish People. E. Hogan. SJ. quot. p. 55.

in no mean measure, testifies to the feminine self-respect of this period. We have already had occasion to dwell at length on the cruelty exercised towards Irish ladies in Cromwellian days, and pointed out how it was in revenge for their patriotic activities. Here we wish to cite one noted instance of Cromwellian barbarism, which seems to have been dictated by the hellish desire to expose to the basest insults not merely pride of race, but the most delicate feminine modesty. A low scoundrel named Hurd, who was governor of Galway in 1655, took fiendish delight in making a laughing-stock of the women of that city by ordering them to discard their Irish cloaks, knowing well they had little else save ludicrous apparel to shelter them from the public eye. Yet, the efforts they put forth to shield their womanly sense of propriety, even at the cost of social dignity, must redound forever to the fair name of Galway. On the day subsequent to Hurd's orders there could be seen on the streets "most of the women appearing in men's coats — high-born ladies who had been plundered of all their property by the rapacious soldiers, sinking their shame before the gaze of the public, with their ragged or patched clothes, and sometimes with embroidered table-covers, or a stripe of tapestry torn from the walls, or some lappets cut from the bed-curtains, thrown over their head and shoulders. Other women covered their shoulders only with blankets

or sheets, or table clothes, or any other sort of wrapper they could lay their hands on. You would have taken your oath that all Galway was a masquerade, the unrivalled home of scenic buffons, so irresistibly ludicrous were the varied dresses of the poor women.''* Hurd's poisoned arrows reached the target of their Irish pride, but failed to do anything to their modesty save glorify it.

Notwithstanding the butcheries and acts of shame directed by the Cromwellians against Irish womanhood, the men of the Gael, whose souls were harrowed by the sight of these atrocities, could not get themselves to revenge their outraged wives and daughters by disrespectful treatment of the ladies of the Saxon. The fact that in this respect they maintained a noble reputation speaks volumes of praise for their innate reverence for womankind, and shows that this attitude must have been largely the resultant of a truly moral and honourable native femininity. The testimony we deduce in favour of this noble bearing of Irishmen we get from the lips of a Privy Counsellor of Ireland. His statement is that ''though unarmed men, women and children, were killed in thousands by command of the Lords Justices, the Irish sent multitudes of our people, both before and since these cruelties were done, as well officers and soldiers as women and children, carefully con-

* Cam. Ever. ed. Kelly. Dub. 1848. vol. II. p. 207.

veyed, to the sea-ports and other places of safety.''*

Of the purity of woman's life during the next century we are told by men who were strongly antagonistic to Irish patriotic endeavor. Such an eminent authority as Lecky has paid splendid compliments to the moral integrity of eighteenth century Irish women, and the purifying and elevating effect it had upon the nation. His testimony is all the more valuable seeing that his highly reputable veracity as a historian forced him to admit, despite his anti-Catholic bias, the existence of something admirable within a church organisation which he despised. In like manner, Arthur Young, an Englishman, in his Tour of Ireland in 1776, gave a very favourable report of womanly morality. Amongst the gentry, indeed, he observed considerable moral laxity, but the general body of the people furnished a womanhood that was exemplary in its fidelity to its noblest instincts.

But even in his criticism of the gentry, we find that Young was far too severe. We have already glanced into the attractive home life and shining civic virtues of the women who adorned the last troubled years of this century, and we must not forget that for the most part they belonged to upper class society, and to the Protestant faith to boot. Some of them, too, were the products of the city, and surely, if their womanly grandeur

* Cromwellian Settlement. Prendergast. Dub. 1875. p. 71.

survived the temptations of their surroundings, it is not far-fetched to assume that they had, in the pure atmosphere of the countryside, many a lady of high standing in society, with a moral character akin to theirs.

Passing on to the nineteenth century, we find ourselves flooded with a mass of material testifying to the goodness of Irish womanhood. Volumes based on that material might be written, but here we can not afford, in a general survey of Irish women, to sin against the rules of proportion by giving relatively more space to the ladies of this period than to those of other days. In this particular instance this is especially true, because so much evidence has been produced in print from statistics and otherwise to show the morality of Irish women of recent times, and the world is so universally convinced of the fact, that there is scarcely any need of reasserting its truth.

However, we cannot pass it over in perfect silence. Beginning with citations from authorities, we find Count d'Avèze, early in the century, noting in the west the very soul of honour and queenliness of spirit reflected in the countenances of Irish women. "While contemplating," he says, "these poor women, for the moment, I confess that their titles of nobility seemed to radiate from their brows, and I gave way to the idea that they were really descended from the blood of kings." Dr. Brown pays a high tribute to the Irishwoman's

religion and love of children, and the large families they have reared and continue to rear as an incontrovertible proof of both these characteristics. Dr. Brownson, an American, attributed in 1873 the strength of Irish manhood to a large extent "to the pure and virtuous lives of the women of the race for which they have been distinguished in all ages." Elie Réclus, a Frenchman, asserts that "there are few countries of Europe whose women possess so much dignity and self-respect" as those of Ireland. George Petrie, speaking in 1821, says that he saw in his travels through the island "young and unmarried women, with cloaks carelessly disposed in picturesque draperies, whilst their attitude bespoke the presence of youthful affection and innocent simplicity." Finally, the Rev. William Maxwell, a Protestant divine, tells us that in certain parts of Ireland despite a rather abnormal affection for drink on the part of the men, "deceived and deserted females are seldom seen."

This nobility of Irish women has been the theme of countless songs throughout the century. For the most part, it is found interwoven with the great basic virtue of love that radiates purity and strength. Many pages might be filled with selections illustrative of poetry's passion for this theme. We are compelled to limit ourselves to two, one of which was written early in the century, and the other quite recently.

The first we give is that intensely passionate yet sublime address to love by O'Curnain, entitled Loves Despair.

"Love that my life began,
Love that will close life's span,
Love that grows ever by love-giving:
Love from the first to last,
Love till all life be past,
Love that loves on after living.

Bear all things evidence
Thou art my very sense,
My past, my present and my morrow.
All else on earth is crost,
All in the world is lost—
Lost all—but the great love gift of sorrow."

The woman that could create in the soul of a poet such a spark of heavenly passion could not but be magnificent.

The other poem we take from a book of Padraic Colum's verse. It is a lullaby that reveals the world of exquisite tenderness entombed in the heart of the twentieth century Irish mother for her child. It shows how rigidly her eyes are rivetted on the sanctum of the cradle, and how sacred she regards the atmosphere which surrounds it, whilst in other parts of the world 'progressive ideas' would seek to rid it of much of this 'superstitious' character and exchange its 'folly' for the more up-to-date demands of materialist eugenics.

"O! Men from the fields!
Come gently within.
Tread softly, softly,
O! Men coming in.

Mavourneen is going
From me and from you,
Where Mary will fold him
With mantle of blue!

From reek of the smoke
And cold of the floor,
And the peering of things
Across the half-door.

O! Men from the fields!
Soft, softly come through
Mary puts around him
Her mantle of blue."

There is also another type of poetry, the poetry of architecture, that lives in the sculptured marble and the chiseled beauty of stone-work of many a sacred edifice, that proclaims the grandeur of soul of modern Irish womanhood. Rivalling the princely church-builders of old, who gave to Ireland so many of those abbeys of meditative loveliness, are the daughters of the Gael, who have worked since the days of Catholic emancipation for the construction of churches to replace the confiscated and plundered ones of their ancestors. In one sense they have surpassed the women of old, for unlike them, they are for the most part

poor in the world's goods, though doubtless the blood of many of them has been derived from a noble ancestry, whose broad lands the hireling and the stranger possess. They could not, however, be robbed of the gold of generosity and the priceless heritage of their faith. Even the Irish servant girl has established an envious reputation for herself as a generous donor of funds for the erection of churches. Hundreds of sacred edifices in the English-speaking world almost completely owe their existence to the hard won money of the humble daughters of Ireland. They adorn not only their own land, but the Republic of the Starry Flag, the continent of the Southern Cross, mute but majestic witnesses of the loyalty of Irish womanhood to the twin inspirations of the voice of their Maker, and the traditions of their race.

The zeal that has upreared so many churches continues to provide in abundance maidens for the rigours of convent life. Every year hundreds dedicate themselves to this cloistered existence where their spiritual work for the nation's youth is very considerable. Since this has rarely been questioned, we see no need for dwelling at length on it here. There are many, however, who maintain that the good conferred on the people by their hidden life of religion is solely spiritual, and that in it all secular and civic usefulness are lost. With these we decidedly disagree.

To prove our contention, we will select one feature of secular life, the industrial, in which

Sisterhoods have done solid patriotic work for their country. In several important centres Irish nuns are in control of industries which provide employment for many hundreds, for whom otherwise emigration would be the only alternative. The thriving Youghal Needlelace Industry owes its origin in the famine-swept days of 1847 to the noble efforts of Sister Mary Anne Smyth. Very few who have learned the work of this institution have ever been lured from the services of their country to foreign climes. In the same year the Sisters of Mercy in Sligo started a cookery and laundry, by which several were rescued from starvation and death. This institution still flourishes, and since 1880 has added to its work the teaching of hosiery-making. Since 1900 the Sisters of St. Louis have directed some of the energy of Bundoran towards the making of the well-known Carrickmacross lace. Instances like these might be enumerated for several towns in Ireland to show that the modern daughters of the ancient faith are, in their attention to the needs of the body, as well as those of the soul, true to the tradition that has come down to them from the great Abbess of Kildare.

Thus it is apparent that the public heroism which has marked the story of Irish womanhood during the last three centuries has been the offspring of that silent heroism that has dwelt in woman's soul, whether by the hearth-stone or in the cloister. The numberless humble ones who, by

christian principles and industrial habits, have supplied the fuel that kept the fires of a nation burning, shall never be known, but the work they have accomplished is none the less glorious than that of those whom the searchlights of publicity have consigned to the everlasting reverence of a people.

CHAPTER XI

Writers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

WHEN last we parted with the women friends of letters at the close of the eighteenth century we saw them endeavoring under the blight of many forces inimical to intellectual culture to keep up the honourable tradition of their land as patrons rather than writers of literature. The confinement of their literary efforts to this sphere was necessitated by the penal laws which reigned in their country and threatened with prosecution and punishment all possible flowerings of the national genius. The old learning which expressed the soul of the Gael was forced to seek a refuge in the hedge-school or the secrecy of a few great homes whilst England's brand of enlightenment arrayed in imperial garb was offered in its stead to an enslaved people. All that could be done in such circumstances was to prevent the national soul from becoming the prey of the imperial schoolmasters by keeping it true to its ancient cult in the "catacombs." This Ireland did and we have seen what a part woman played in the defensive struggle.

That work merited for the feminine mind of Ireland an opportunity in later times of displaying what it could achieve within the world of literary production which hitherto it was compelled merely to protect and patronise. How it availed itself of this opportunity that the destruction of penal statutes brought it we are about to show by presenting to the reader a procession of the leading women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this pageant of the devotees of the pen there shall march a body of Irish ladies whose literary output bears favourable comparison with that of their masculine rivals. A few striking individuals in the ranks of manhood have far surpassed the best women authors of Ireland but the average lady-writer can lay claim to as meritorious work as the average labourer within the ranks of manhood can boast of.

Giving priority of position to poetry the first worker in that field in the early part of the nineteenth century to claim our attention is Lady Dufferin. Her genius was probably a heritage as well as a personal endowment for her grandfather was none other than the reknowned Richard Brindsley Sheridan. Her poems were primarily songs and every song was a melody of tear-jewels revealing the sad beauty of a suffering race. One of these that will forever keep her memory fresh is the Irish Emigrant, which so simply and spontaneously tells of the pangs of exile endured by

the children of the Gael sundered from home and kin. It does not seem rash to state that few who have read it in boyhood days do not think with tenderness of its creator and bless her for the reminder she gave them of the loyalty they owe whether at home or abroad to that Dark Rosaleen whom in impressionable years they were taught to cherish. Bearing a like message is Terence's Farewell. It mingles the pathos of exile with sweet strains of love whilst its dancing humour shows the everlasting sunshine that no sorrow could expel from the Irish heart.

Resembling her muse was that of Mrs. Julia Crawford who was a distinguished daughter of County Cavan. From her prolific pen came over a hundred songs and amongst them that musical gem, Kathleen Mavourneen. For this song alone the poetess has earned the undying thanks of her people for it can never fail to charm them whilst they treasure the gold of a haunting air and the magic interwoven with pure true love.

In Young Ireland days appeared Lady Wilde wielding a more robust and stormy pen in the interests of patriotism than any of those we have mentioned. In early life she had been so completely outside the pale of national belief that when she saw the funeral of Thomas Davis passing she confessed her complete ignorance of the dead patriot to whom the last honours of death were being paid. Her presence in Young Ireland ranks was therefore due to a radical conversion

from the modes of thought of her girlhood. Like most of those great spirits which have leaped from the darkness of error into the white light of consciousness of fealty to a sacred faith and ideal she carried with her new creed an invincible vehemence and fire in its advocacy. The energy and sincerity of the convert forged upon the printed page a supply of verbal weapons calculated to stir the most phlegmatic of her readers.

Side by side with her worked Mrs. Kevin Izod O'Doherty, "Eva" of the Nation whose heroism we have already referred to. This young lady's patriotic poems remind one of that vigorous freshness and vitality which live in the winds that buffet the coast of her native Galway. They vent their clean fury on all that is foul and cry with an elemental strength against the unjust political structures that are the handiwork of man.

With these two stormy petrels of Young Ireland verse there was also associated Ellen Downing, "Mary of the Nation," whose voice of poetic indignation though not as rugged, was none the less firm and determined than, theirs. With the calm vision of the saint she scanned all the mountain summits whereon patriotic right is seated and in sweet but unfaltering accents bade her countrymen toil through woe and weal until all storms vanquished they reached those serene heights and could gaze down from the majesty thereof on a land where the quietude of justice had resumed

its sway. The atmosphere of gracefulness and devout feeling upon which these directions were borne girt them round with that strength in appeal which always accompanies the dictates of a pure and gentle yet indomitable conscience.

For many years longer she might have prolonged her good work but a sore disappointment crept into her life and dried up the founts of her inspiration. One whom she had loved with a sincere Irish love forsook her and she left the troubled ways of the world for the reposeful solitude of the convent. There she prayed for her beloved land but never again wrote patriotic verse. "She put by the lyre and in utter seclusion from the world lingered for a while; but ere long the spring flowers blossomed on her grave."

Advancing into the latter half of the nineteenth century we greet that poetic embodiment of Irish patriotism, Ethna Carbery. Coming from the land of Tyrconnell where the mystery-laden mists so love to hold in their embrace the brows of the mountains and endow them with that Celtic and fairy-like fascination which lives in the grey cloudiness of Irish landscapes her soul drank in great draughts of the secrets of her native hills and under the influence of their intoxication sang in strains of weird beauty of the old old message of Eire to her children. Nature, in fact, seemed to be almost the sole source of her patriotic inspiration for she found in everything in her native place a medium through which to express the irre-

pressible story of the ages associated with it. She appeared to feel the imminence of a national spirit in the very winds that fanned into vigour her beloved Donegal and she took up the pen not to create a beautiful fabric of words but to find an outlet for the patriotic fire that consumed her. That the alpha and omega of her songful inspiration was a sense of patriotism appears not only in her verse but in the testimony of her distinguished husband, Seumas Mac Manus. "From childhood," he says, "till the closing hour every fibre of her being vibrated with the love of Ireland. Before the tabernacle of poor Ireland's hopes she burned in her bosom a perpetual flame of faith. Her great warm heart kept the door of its fondest affection wide open to all who loved Ireland—and in her heart of hearts was sacredly cherished the memory of the holy dead who died for Ireland."

As a result a tender simplicity and sincerity characterised all her poetry. Her folk songs were unsophisticated but this quality was their passport to her heart of a people close to nature, a people whom she loved to fancy as fellow-sharers with her of a love of their past and their beautiful present. No checks of technique injured the flow of her feeling. She spoke directly to her countrymen because she liked a heart to heart melody. The pity is that she ceased to speak so soon and that death smiled on her at an early age and called her from her soulful chantings.

A prominent writer of the same generation as Ethna Carbery is Catharine Tynan Hinkson. Like the latter poetess she is gifted with a fascinating spontaneity. As some critic so well phrased it she is "an authentic singer with the true lyric note that she seems to have caught from the birds of the trees." The buoyancy of the heart-song constantly abides in her poetry and yet for all its sunshine we miss in it the sweetness of mourning for a sacred cause that hovers o'er the stanzas of Ethna.

One, however who reminds us more of the Donegal songstress is Alice Furlong. She is a product of the City of Dublin yet there is little of the artificial atmosphere of urban life in her verse. She gives utterance to a music as delicately pathetic as the sighing of the wind amongst the reeds on the rim of a bleak Irish lake. Yet for all its sadness it is never foresaken by sweetness. To her generation we might also assign Alice Milligan who hails from the North of Ireland. In the land of the O'Neills she was born and there she found much of the mental pabulum that resulted in the breezy ballads she has given to Ireland.

Belonging to the latest flowering of Irish poetry are many of the group of young writers of today. With the exception of Dora Sigerson who died recently they are relatively young and may yet bequeath a large crop of thought to their land.

Though death did not find Dora Sigerson in

the ripeness of old age she left behind her a considerable amount of verse. She was destined by living in England to be divorced from the constant influence of her native soil yet her mind always clung to the land of her birth. A decidedly Celtic atmosphere envelops her writing and this is the fundamental reason of its best literary characteristics. The fascinating weirdness of her poems revealing the doings of distinctively Celtic sprites, the fairies, makes us forget her mere technical deficiencies. She may err in metrics and in style but she handles with a deft hand that familiarity which exists between Irish character and the invisible world. She makes us love the fairies despite all their elfish malice because she makes them so human without robbing them of their supernatural anchorage. They are so Irish in all their ways that we insinctively forgive them.

In addition her diction is admirably adapted to her subject. The rhythmic swing of her ballads is as free and airy as the goblins that are its theme. The familiarity and homeliness of expression with which they reach out to the heart are akin to that atmosphere of kindly relations which they seek to generate in us towards the world of the spiritual.

Very close in character to the poetry of Dora Sigerson is that of Nora Hopper. It has a like clinging mysteriousness of thought whilst the weird apparel of its words intensifies the uncanniness of its conceptions. Though extensive the

fecundity that characterises it it does not seem to lower the standard of its poetic quality. It is always as fresh as the dew on an Irish hillside and tenderness and gems of fancy seldom abandon it. No less an authority than Mr. Yeats, perhaps Ireland's greatest singer in the English language, has acclaimed her "Ballads of Prose" as an adeptly woven fabric of mystic thought and symbol. "They delight us," he says, "by their mystery, as ornament full of lines, too deeply interwoven to bother us with discoverable secret, delights us with its mystery; and as ornament is full of strange trees and flowers that were once the symbols of great religions, and are now mixing one with the other, and changing into new shapes, this book is full of old beliefs and stories, mixing and changing in an enchanted dream."

For the next writer we go to the County of Antrim. This is Moira O'Neill. She has given pleasant glimpses of the peasant soul of Ireland and she has not spoiled their sincerity by any vulgarity of literary artifice. But Irish literature is most of all indebted to her for her masterpiece, "Corrymeela," where she sings with a lambent fluency of the mysteries of the dawn reminiscent of the free limpid progress of her native hill-rimmed rivulets in the Glens of Antrim.

And last of all treading the ways of mysticism come Susan Mitchell and Ella Young. They have gazed into the wondrous worlds which George

Russell has pointed out and more distinctly than any of their sisters of the pen have attempted to fashion visions for themselves like unto his. With these we part with the daughters of poesy and turn to those who were content to labour in the literature of prose.

In this department of letters, especially romance, Irish women in modern days have climbed into high favour and carried off many laurels from the men. In this respect, too, it is our belief they have displayed far more talent than those of their sisters who used poetry as a medium of expression.

In discussing these ladies we can make a very dignified start with Maria Edgeworth who is the doyen of them all and as a novelist holds a high place amongst kindred writers of the English speaking world of her day. Her "Castle Rackrent" with its beaming humour cleverly mingled with exquisite pathos is generally recognised as her masterpiece. Looking at her work as a whole she accomplished for the Ireland of her day something worthy of her comparison with what Scott achieved for his native land. The folk-lore and feelings of her country she made tribuary to her pen and utilised them to produce works of high artistic value. So self-sacrificing was she and so sacred a conception had she of her literary duty towards her native land that she refused her hand in marriage to one whom she deeply loved that her activity as an author might not be checked. She sacrificed him and everything else

that her heart desired when they were deemed inimical to the interests of her country.

She was not, however, a solitary prose luminary in her age. There was Lady Morgan who worked at fiction and wrote novels that were fearless and honest and rooted in a soul that loved its country. She was one of the best literary supporters that the Emancipator had. To the early nineteenth century Dublin gave Anna Jameson, who was the author of some tales and a vigorous pen exponent of the rights of women. Caroline Norton who laboured so arduously for the betterment of woman's status and the condition of the poor was a romantic writer of high standing and in this sphere displayed a power of repartee that was not surpassed by her zeal as a doer of good deeds. From the Marble City came Mary Costello to whom Ireland is indebted for sketches of Dublin which are vivid and worthy of remembrance. Lismore was honoured by being the birthplace of Julia Crotty who attained distinction by portrayals of Irish character. Her pictures sometimes caused offense to sensitive readers but she quailed not before criticism for she justified herself on the grounds of realism. Mrs. Sadlier in her enthusiasm for the moral uplift of her countrymen used with considerable success the novel as a means to attain her end. Castle Daly, one of the best of Irish stories owes its existence to Annie Keary.

We now pass on to a group of novelists who primarily belong to a later period. The first we

select for consideration is Jane Barlow whose name is a very respectable one in Irish literature. In her work there gleams a wealth of peasant character that bespeaks marked gentleness and simplicity on the part of the writer. Silvered streaks of humour and golden veins of pathos are everywhere in scintillating evidence. A wit that leaps forth from picturesque and musical language is constantly present to endow with a perennial freshness the creations of the artist. To sum up in the words of George Green in the Treasury of Poetry, "it may be doubted, indeed, whether anyone has, to the same extent, sounded the depths of Irish character in the country districts and touched so many chords of sympathy, humour and pathos as Jane Barlow."

With an object kindred to that of Miss Barlow, Elisabeth Blackburne Casey devoted herself to romantic literature. Amid the pasture lands of Meath she found many interesting peasant subjects for her pen. In the manipulation of these she exhibited certain dramatic powers which lent a striking vitality to her tales. Coupling with this an attractive and picturesque background, she succeeded in producing sketches of the peasant soul endowed with uncommon brilliancy and vividness.

At a distance from pastoral influences in the City of Dublin Mrs. Blundell first saw light. However, as she advanced in years, she found

herself in surroundings more congenial to her nature. She left the "madding crowds," and the places where the artificial and material knock so loudly at the gates of the heart for the romantic and mystery-haunted highlands of Donegal. There, despite the ravages of a long and painful disease, she held her ear ever open to receive the whisperings of wonder. The pleasure that these messages from a marvel world afforded her she told of in sweet tales brimming over with Arabian-like magic. She wrote them especially for the perusal of children who are always so near to the wonder-world and who wreathe with glory "that never was on land or sea" what to mature eyes seem the most commonplace realities.

In a part of the country, similar to Donegal because of its remarkable immunity from the artificialities of life, did Emily Lawless find food for her novels. Revelling in the gaunt, wild scenery of West Clare and Galway, she extracted from the granite-sheathed hills and the wind-vexed precipices material for the construction of some of the best novels that Ireland possesses. Here, in this hinterland of the Gael, she witnessed how close the heart of man was to the throbbings of nature's heart, and what a harmony prevailed between them. Into her novels she introduced with marked success this intimacy between man and nature to which she attached the weird adornment of the grand terrors of the West mingling dramatically with its embracing pity.

In the same inspiring West did Rosa Mulholland find fuel for the fire of a writer's soul. From the mountains there came to her the voice of a romance, coupled with that message of mysticism that gives a distinctly religious tinge to her writings. Yet, for all her hankering after the mysterious, she loves a serene simplicity, which seems to have been dictated by her love for children, for whom she intended so many of her books.

Rosa brings us to the end of the writers of romantic works. A few others still remain who devoted themselves to a literature of a different type, and to these we must devote a few pages, before our final farewell to women literateurs of Ireland.

In dramatic literature there is a distinguished representative in Lady Gregory, who has done as much, perhaps, for the Irish stage, as anyone in the history of Ireland. Her name must be forever linked with that revival in dramatic art, which began with the last decade of the nineteenth century. Living in the western Gaelthacht, she was closely in touch with that folklore which provided material for the most successful type of play that the dramatic movement has produced. Utilising this, she has produced stage literature of high merit. To the sphere of a writer, however, she has not limited herself. She has worked zealously for the success of the Abbey Theatre, and has never failed to encourage all aspiring writers who are endeavoring to produce dramatic

literature that might lend lustre to that playhouse and their country.

In the more sober subject of history, Sarah Atkinson displayed in periodical literature a mind of no mean calibre. In her footsteps has followed Mrs. John Richard Green, who is a worthy wife of a distinguished husband, and one of the most scholarly historians that Ireland has produced. Her contributions to the story of her land reveal a cultured intellect, steeped in the lore of the past. For the economic and educational department of their history which had been so badly neglected, Irishmen are especially indebted to the labours of Mrs. Green.

Another lady, Frances Power Cobbe, invaded a realm that is closely associated with that of the historian. She delved into the problems of sociology, and herein won considerable respect for herself by the able manner in which she championed the rights of women in public life. She did this, too, through the medium of a style that was fresh and attractive. Thus, the readable character of her writings, as well as the interesting material they contained, won for her a very large circle of readers.

In a sphere partly historical and partly literary, three other ladies laboured with considerable success. Eleanor Hull has done much for early romantic history, and her work on the ancient tales has largely contributed to their being more sympathetically and widely known. Miss Stokes,

the sister of the well-known authority on Celtic literature, has done a good deal for the cause of Gaelic scholarship. In Irish scenery and its historical associations, Mrs. S. C. Hall found especial interest, and her work in this respect has added largely to that fascination which the physical contour of a country, viewed in the light of the past, always holds for a nation that reveres the great days gone by.

But, the most sublime path of all was reserved for the literary foot-prints of Agnes Mary Clarke. Clad in the robes of the astronomer, she sought the mysteries of the firmament. In this capacity she exhibited an acute power of observation, for her thought was characterised by a profundity and accurateness that shone to fullest advantage through a clear medium of expression. Yet, for all the depths plumbed by her mind, she managed to speak of her scientific researches in a manner that was highly attractive.

We can not let the curtain down on the women devotees of literature without mentioning the Countess of Blessington. Though a novelist of some note, she primarily deserves to be remembered for the kindness she bestowed on all who loved a life of letters. Belonging to hospitable Tipperary, she was as noble an ornament of that county as was Margaret O'Connor in mediaeval days of the principality of Offaly. For fourteen years her spirit of hospitality welcomed to her home wit and genius, whenever they sought an

entry. From beyond the seas, as well as from different parts of her own land, learned men were lured to the pleasing atmosphere of her home. In the words of Mr. Proctor, "men famous for art and science in distant lands sought her friendship, and the historians and scholars, the poets and the wits, and painters of her own country found an unfailing welcome in her ever hospitable home." She maintained in the nineteenth century that tradition of devotion to the elevated and immaterialistic concept of civilisation, which is the only explanation of what Mr. G. K. Chesterton calls the 'miracle' of Ireland's survival as a nation.

CHAPTER XII

The Mothers and Daughters of Today

HITHERTO we have, for the most part, devoted our attention to that section of Irish womanhood which has come prominently before the public eye; we now intend to swing the censer of praise before the shrine of the multitudes of great ones who, in the secret places of their quiet homes, keep kindled the fires that contribute to the perpetuity of the nation's life.

It is a truism, yet one that never grows stale by repetition, that as the family is, so the nation shall be. If this is true of nations that live the most artificial of lives and do greatest violence to family traditions, it is especially verifiable amongst a people like the Irish who are still so close to nature, and considerably influenced in their national activity by the precepts and customs of their sires. It is evident, then, that the force that moulds in such a community the life of the family possesses an extraordinary potency to shape the destiny of the nation. Such a force we believe to be primarily the property of Irish mothers.

The Irish mother is as true to her God-given

nature as any that breathes on earth, for she dedicates herself with the most sacrosanct sense of fidelity to the most essential work of motherhood, the care of the child.

This solicitude for her offspring is most in evidence in the Irish mother's clinging love of the cradle. She gives personal attention to the child at the most troublesome stage of its existence, and, wealthy or poor, rarely deems any other hand than her own worthy of watching by the infant's cot. And what a care she lavishes on the little one that God has sent her! Who that has ever heard an Irish mother whisper in tenderest accents her love to her little one, or fling the caresses of her dream-song round the infant fancy, can fail to realise what a world of maternal affection dwells within her bosom? She has the sweetest lullabies that any mother can boast of wherewith to lull to sleep the baby mind. Her slumber songs are so sleep-inducing, that rarely does childish restlessness fail to surrender to their crooning magic. For this reason she seldom needs those artificial methods of the more 'cultured' mothers of humanity to hand over her child to the strengthening repose of slumberland. She gives a peace by the sheer overflow of her maternal feeling and the music of her soul to her infant care that nothing else can provide.

This solicitude for the infant she may have to manifest for many a year, for her affection for children is not alienated as her married life

advances by the frivolous objects that entertain the foolish attention of so many women in countries where science is developed to the detriment of morality. Yet, she fears not the trouble that every new child-gift from the Almighty may occasion her, for she has not succumbed to any materialistic creed that cherishes physical comfort more than the dictates of duty. She knows the value of the child soul, which is the most precious thing that heaven could give to earth. As a true christian she knows the necessity and worth of self-sacrifice as a means of attaining any end that is great and sublime, whether in the spiritual or temporal order. Accordingly, she understands that if she is to entertain the hope of having sons and daughters who shall be her pride and her glory, she must be ready to endure the suffering, mental and physical, that is associated with the rearing of a family. This is distinctly her spirit, and it rarely fails to reap the reward of the splendid self-denial on which it is based. The average Irish family is large, and seldom disloyal to the one mainly responsible for its moral and physical well-being.

Next to the religious motive, some merely natural attributes of the Celt contribute to the strength of the maternal instinct in the Irish woman. The element of the affectionate is universally admitted to be one of the leading constituents of Irish character. It manifests itself in a thousand different ways, and largely explains

the position of universal esteem which the Irish race enjoys amongst every people that feels its warmth. If this is true of the nation as a whole it is decidedly so of its womanhood, which finds in motherhood an opportunity of expressing the strongest and purest human love that warms our terrestrial globe. Even the terms of endearment with which she addresses her child bespeak in the Irish mother the refined and intense passion which consumes her. Such love-expressions as 'pulse of my heart,' 'vein of my heart,' 'my share of the world thou art' reveal the shrine that maternal love possesses in the inmost recesses of the Irish mother's being. This affectionate bent of her nature is reenforced by her racial imaginativeness and romanticism. The possibilities that the future holds for the child, and the dreams she weaves round its developing mind very often provide her with a powerful incentive to bestow on it her most jealous care. Then, she has that intense Celtic pride of family, which urges her to rear children who shall be worthy of the best traditions of those who came before her. And finally, she is endowed with an instinctive conservatism which is a strong barrier against all temptations to abandon the home for more 'up-to-date' activities outside it.

This love of the home makes her dwelling-place not a mere inhabitable edifice of brick and mortar and furniture. It is not so much mere property, to be arbitrarily bartered for money. It entombs

a something which cannot be purchased. It is, in a word, a home in the truest, and, if you will, the most old-fashioned sense of the word. It is the centre of all the most treasured memories of her own and her family's life. It has wound itself so intimately into her fancy, and has, so to speak, absorbed so much of the family soul by constant association with it, that it cannot be abandoned without doing violence to an integral part of the mother's spiritual existence. Thus does her innate conservatism transform the prosaic house of stone and mortar into the poetic and spiritual entity called the home, and bind her heart to it by the strongest of bonds.

Where such devotion to the home exists, there must be present a high standard of morality. This is certainly realised in the feminine head of the Irish household. Her devotion to religion is revealed in several ways, to only a few of which we can here pay attention. She is strongly attached to prayer. In fact, her daily existence is, to a large extent, immersed in an atmosphere of prayer. Prayerfulness is manifest in most of her daily actions. During the day her ordinary conversation is shot through and through with the names of things sacred. And when the special time for prayer arrives at night, the whole family must faithfully assemble, to lay the wreathe of the Rosary at Mary's feet. Not content with this, she arranges a program of prayers at the con-

clusion of the Rosary, which begs the Creator's aid for the entire world, and especially for those in the throes of suffering and distress. Friends and enemies, poor and rich, christians and unbelievers, all find themselves commended to the mercy of the Most High, by the pitiful, devotional soul of the Irish mother.

And the virtues she exalts in her prayers she strives to practise. She is no mechanical utterer of pious phrases. She walks along a high path of virtue, especially that of purity. She is a model of modesty, and her marked devotion to her marriage vow saves Ireland from those disgraceful scenes which disfigure the moral and social life of so many other countries. Not only has her husband no cause for complaint in this respect, but her uprightness is a considerable factor in the preservation of her partner's moral integrity. Drink is the greatest vice with which the Irishman has to contend, and many an Irish husband has been kept from rushing over its precipice to destruction by the angel efforts of a good wife. Oftentimes it occasions the wife a veritable white martyrdom to accomplish this, but she considers the victory gained a sufficient recompense for the sufferings endured.

Still more beneficial, perhaps, is her influence over her sons and daughters, for it is reenforced by an authority which they dare not disrespect. Oftentimes her sons remain with her until they are mature men, for late marriages have become

the custom in Ireland, yet they are always her 'boys' and follow her guidance with a boyish instinct. Very likely, it is this submission to long maternal tutelage that engenders more than aught else in the Irishman that deep-seated respect for womanhood, of which his nation is so proud. For her daughters, she is a worthy example of womanly modesty and piety. Her vigilance carefully shields them, and many liberties that are ordinarily granted to young ladies of other countries are denied these. Their relations with young men are most rigidly scrutinised, for the maternal instinct treasures most of all that virtue that has been the glory of the daughters of the Gael for all time. Assuredly, when we think of the honour and purity of Irish youth, we cannot fail to see how nobly the Irish mother fulfills the high mission entrusted to her by Providence. We can not resist endorsing the beautiful tribute paid the Irish mother by a recent writer, when he says: "She is the foremost among the hidden saints of earth. A follower of Christ, whose cloister is within the four walls of the home. A lover of Christ, whose little kingdom comprises the treasured souls whom God has given her to guide. A ruler of Christ, who draws her subjects to her by sanctity and love. Her told-worn hands that clasp the old, brown rosary, are eloquent of strength to seize and lift to good all souls they meet; her lips are moulded to lines of peace by years of unending prayer, and murmured benisons

over sleeping babes; upon her brow eternal calm and resignation sit enthroned.''*

If the Irish mother's love for the beauty of the moral order is so intense and sublime, her admiration for the God-given love of country is none the less insistent. Today she is manifesting a heroism in the cause of her land that bids fair to emulate that of Irish matrons in the most trying days of the past. Only a few years ago, she manifested a fortitude that might grace the story of Ireland in the days of its greatest sacrifices. In that glorious week of 1916, when the husband and son went forth against overwhelming odds to battle for their country, Irish wives and mothers offered, with sorrow-rent and dauntless hearts, their men to the great mother of them all, the Poor Old Woman. Many of these husbands and sons made the supreme sacrifice of their lives, and hundreds of them endured the tortures of a prison existence, whilst their women-folk had to bear the terrible anguish of the mind as they pondered, in the loneliness of their homes, on the miseries suffered by their patriot men. Yet, they could not be broken, and though natural sorrow played havoc with their spirits, their will to stand by the manhood of their homes remained unconquerable. And, at this moment, their heroic patience and encouragement are some of the greatest aids that a manhood struggling against a militaristic tyranny could have. In the martyrdom of the spirit which they

* The Soul of Ireland. W. J. Lockington. SJ. p. 110.

nobly bear, their men find a strength and inspiration that nerve them for any martyrdom of the body which foreign despotism may impose upon them.

From the mothers of to-day we turn for a moment to their daughters, to see how the seed of maternal example and teaching produces fruit in their character.

The young women of Ireland can perhaps carry off the premier prize of the world for maidenly modesty and purity. They are as bountifully dowered as the daughters of any land with those natural gifts which, if not properly used, prove seriously detrimental to morality. They are as attractive, physically, as any that breathe, for the Divine Artist has endowed their forms with a beauty that cannot be surpassed anywhere. They have as keen a sense of the joie de vivre, and as generous a fund of the sunniness of life as can be claimed by the girlhood of any nation. Yet, they know where to set up the barriers between true and false pleasure, and rarely seek enjoyment at the expense of morality. There is a lower percentage of illegitimate births in Ireland than in any other country in the world. Whenever a child is born outside wedlock, so shocked is the public sense by the very unusual occurrence, that it brands with an irreparable stigma, and, to a large extent, excommunicates the woman guilty of the crime. The Irish girl's most prevalent mode of

amusement is a type of dance that, perhaps of all the dances in the world, is the most innocent, though inferior to none in vigour and variety. She takes part in this solely to find an outlet for the music of her soul, and the Celtic energy that hungers for the poetry of rythmic movement. When she dreams of a partner in life, the romantic and imaginative in her calls forcibly for the presence of the aesthetic in the future husband, but her primary desire is that her bridegroom have a fair heart and an honourable conscience. She longs with a feminine longing for attractive apparel, but her dress must not sacrifice a sense of maidenly decorum for the false allurements that unbecoming fashions may hold.

As, like her mother, the Irish maiden is moral, so, like her too, she is patriotic. She is an active member of many societies, the avowed aim of which is the emancipation of her country. She is a prominent element in the Gaelic League, that has done and continues to do, so much for the preservation of the ancient Gaelic tongue, for the slain industries of Ireland, and for the resurrected vitality of the manners and customs that sprang from the genius of the Irish Celt. She is a staunch supporter of Sinn Fein, and is always ready, as she was at Easter Week, to offer the testimony of her blood to prove the creed that is in her. She is, in a word, as true to-day to the ancient heritage of her people as any generation of women who

have preceded her, and clings as staunchly to the century-long hope that, when freedom abides again with Eire, its benisons will come in full measure to those who have been and ever shall be, loyal "Women of the Gael."

THE END

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